

South Mills

Small Area Plan

Small Area Plan for The South Mills Village Core Camden County, North Carolina

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Prepared by:

*Students of PLAN 5065, Land Use Planning
Under Supervision of Jerry Weitz, Ph.D., FAICP*

*East Carolina University Department of Geography
Urban and Regional Planning Program*

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This small area plan for South Mills, North Carolina was prepared by the following students in Dr. Jerry Weitz's Land Use Planning class (PLAN 5065) at East Carolina University with revisions and additions by Jerry Weitz, FAICP.



South Mills Student Planning Team (pictured in Edenton)

Back Row, L to R: Nicholas Snyder, Richard "Waller" Whittemore, Thomas Shreve, and Chad Buch (Graduate Assistant)
Front Row, L to R, Christopher Lawson (student and S. Mills Resident), Margaux Kerr, Dylan McDonnell (Graduate student, Team Leader), and John Burlison.

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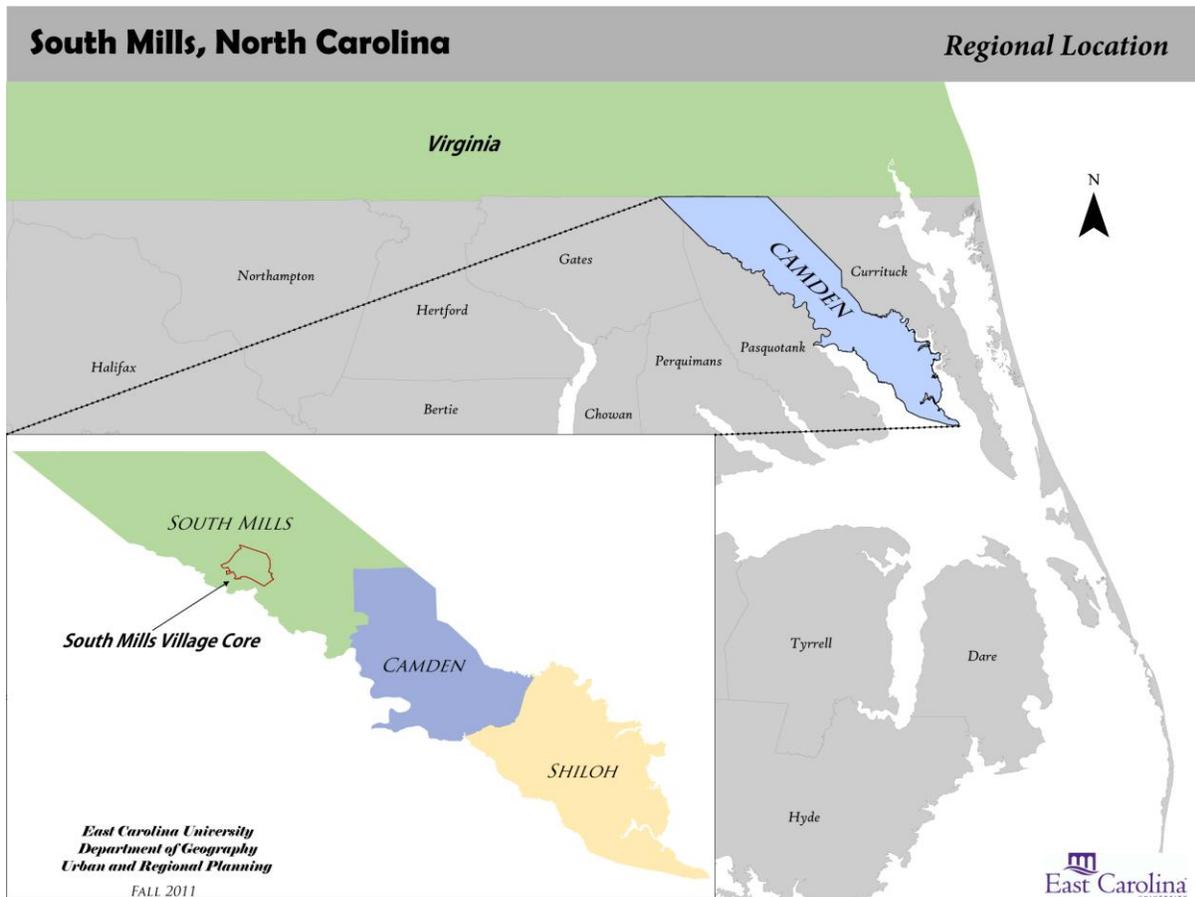
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The plan presented in the following pages addresses issues affecting the township and Village Core area of South Mills, in Camden County, North Carolina. This plan is to be used as guide for the implementation of planning initiatives to take advantage of all that South Mills has to offer. With the suggestions presented in the plan from both the planners and stakeholders of South Mills, we believe that South Mills with the appropriate planning initiatives can maintain its historic and cultural uniqueness.

Regional Setting and Geography

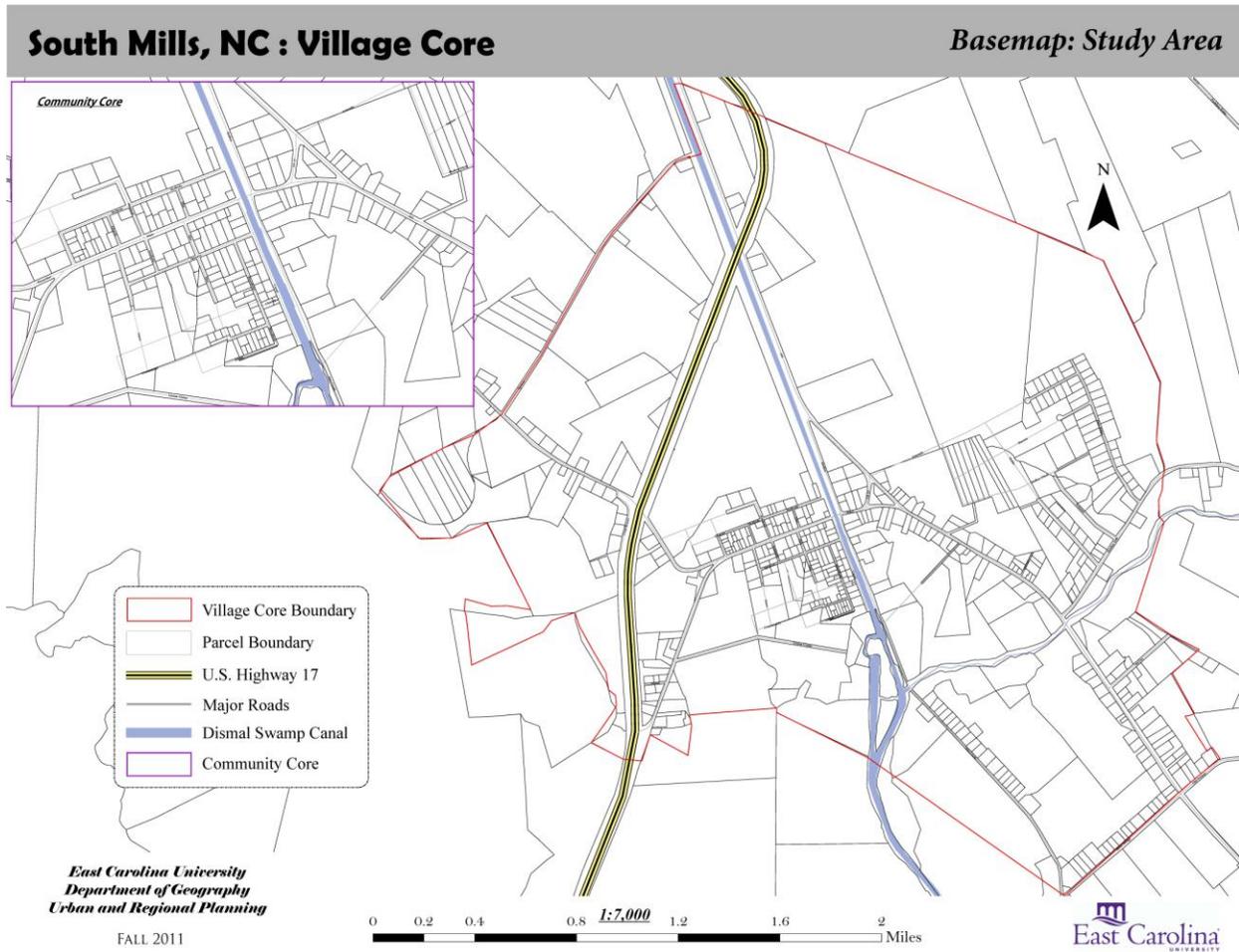
The village of South Mills is located in the northern part of Camden County within the Coastal Plains region of North Carolina. The village is approximately 10 miles south of the Virginia state line and 15 miles north of Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Downtown Norfolk, Virginia, is only 33 miles from South Mills. U.S. Highway 17 Business runs through South Mills, and U.S. Highway 17 By-Pass, runs just outside of the community's core. The U.S. Highway 17 corridor is the region's main connection to the Chesapeake Bay area. Many who travel U.S. Highway 17 pass right by the South Mills Village Core without even knowing it.



With Norfolk and the Virginia Beach area a reasonable commuting distance away, Camden County is a prime location for development spillovers from Virginia. Many people from these areas in Virginia are seeking a reduction of living expenses and more rural living environments. As a result, housing demands have led to sprawling developments across the county. Increasing housing demands have created more opportunities for economic development, but Camden County has yet to witness those opportunities.

Study Area

This plan focuses primarily on the South Mills Village Core area and envisions the redevelopment of the core area while maintaining its historical and cultural uniqueness. The map below shows the village core boundary along with an inset map of the community core. Redevelopment of parts of the community core will increase prospects for economic development and help keep pressure off of outward development of the village, thus preserving agricultural lands and open space surrounding the village. Other ideas and visions are discussed relative to the South Mills community core in this plan.



See also the following page for an aerial image. From the aerial image, one can see that South Mills indeed has characteristics of a compact village set amidst farm and forest lands.

South Mills, Community Core

Aerial Image



Historic Context

Camden County, North Carolina, was settled when English settlers drifted down the Pasquotank River from the Virginia colony. Camden County had an important role to play in the Revolutionary War, contributing 416 officers and soldiers, the most of any county in northeast North Carolina. The county split from Pasquotank County in 1777 to become an independent county. George Washington commissioned the construction of the Dismal Swamp Canal, which took twelve years to build; the construction period lasted from 1793 to 1805. The dirt that was excavated for the canal was used to build the bed of a toll road. The location of the toll road is now the location of U.S. Highway 17. The construction of the canal brought many economic benefits to South Mills, such as the construction of mills near the southern locks of the canal. During the Civil War, the Battle of South Mills was fought near the village. During the battle, Confederate troops created a plot to explode the canal, resulting in the retreat of the Union troops.

Existing and Ongoing Plans and Studies

Existing plans include Camden County's Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) plan, prepared pursuant to North Carolina's coastal zone management statute. The CAMA land use plan

addresses issues such as population, housing, employment and economy, environmental systems, and development. CAMA also includes analysis and projections to base future development while protecting natural resources.

The county has developed a Highway 17 Corridor Plan which includes a Green Industrial Park and a major new master planned development. An image excerpted from the corridor plan is shown below.

Ongoing at the time of this small area planning effort for South Mills was the preparation of Camden County's Comprehensive plan for 2035 by the Clarion Group. This small area plan for South Mills was created as a stand-alone document but is expected to be fully integrated into the county's comprehensive plan upon its completion.

Public Participation

This plan is based on some limited public participation. There were two open house meetings held for the general public. The goal was to gather input on ideas. A survey was also issued to the citizens who attended. Flyers were posted around the core of South Mills where the majority of the population congregates, such as the CITGO gas station next to the drawbridge.

The first meeting was held on October 27, 2011, at the Old Fire Station, off Halstead Street. Eight people attended the open house and gave insight about the needs of the community as well as feedback about our proposed ideas. Each student was able to interact, one on one, with the citizens which resulted in the gathering of multiple ideas including: a historical preservation society, recreational parks for the younger generation, sidewalks for improved accessibility, installation of street lighting to increase security, provision of a medical center closer to town, and establishing a larger grocery store for the community so they don't have to travel 15 minutes to Elizabeth City to shop. A major concern among all the citizens was the mitigation of stormwater and the lack of a stormwater system in the village core.

The second open house was held at the Fairfield Inn and Suites on November 17, 2011. A dozen or so citizens showed up where again proposed ideas were pitched in an effort to gather feedback. The same questionnaire distributed during the October open house was also given out. Most of the citizens liked the ideas posed, yet some were critical in thinking about the finer details of the ideas. The open house style by the end of the session turned into a sit down discussion, as citizens wanted to discuss our plans further. This was extremely beneficial, as ideas were modified to better fit the community's needs.

Results of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire referenced above was divided into three sections. Section one asked questions about the Dismal Swamp Canal, section two asked about redevelopment in the South Mills Community Core along Main Street, and section three asked about the preservation of agriculture and open space.

All of the respondents believed the swamp was an important aspect to their community, and a majority of them use the swamp for recreation, but they also identified accessibility problems. In response to that concern, this plan incorporates a park and small marina to improve accessibility and provide a place for people to interact.

Respondents agreed that creating a more of a downtown in the community core would help South Mills achieve more of an identity. To enjoy a downtown, there needs to be places to eat and shop. South Mills currently lacks much of these essential elements. Some suggestions were made through the survey such as improving stormwater management, providing recreation for youths, installing street lights to U.S. Highway 17 and in other places in the community, as well as sidewalks. Others specifically mentioned the stores they desire in South Mills, such as a Food Lion for groceries, a hardware store, and a medical building for those who are disabled, elderly, and injured. Others suggested that the plan assess the historical values of the community and incorporate them into downtown or place making efforts.

Preservation of agricultural lands and the conservation of open space was also a topic of the community questionnaire. These qualities were highly valued by the citizens according to survey results. In this section, questions asked if the citizens were worried about losing agricultural land and open space to development, and every participant replied with a “yes.” One citizen suggested cluster development and conservation zoning on agricultural land, while others indicated their opposition to multi-family residential development.

With the information gathered from the questionnaire, we were able to get a reasonably good idea of what the people in the community want to see in South Mills in the future.

CHAPTER 2 INVENTORY OF CONDITIONS

This chapter includes natural and built conditions inventories and analysis of land suitability.

Natural Resources and Land Suitability

Camden County has an elevation ranging from near sea level to 24 feet above sea level at the western edge of the Great Dismal Swamp. The Pasquotank River runs along the southwestern border of the county and the North River runs along the southeastern border of the county. About 67% of Camden County is located in a flood hazard area (CAMA Plan, p. 30). South Mills is located in a flood hazard area and the village encounters major flash flooding and storm water runoff. This is one of the many environmental areas of concern in South Mills that has to be considered in small area planning efforts.

Our planning team completed land suitability analyses for the township so as to observe development constrains at a broader scale than the village core study area. A land suitability analysis is a technique to determine the appropriateness of developing land, and in our case it uses the GIS software, ArcGIS. The method of the analysis is based on the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) guidelines for conducting a suitability analysis, since Camden County is CAMA county. The following paragraphs explain how the analysis was conducted and the criteria used.

Out of CAMA's 18 criteria used for a suitability analysis, only eight were consulted because not all criteria apply to (are found within) the South Mills Community Core Area. However of the eight consulted, only four were used to create an environmental composite map of the South Mills Township. Data were collected from North Carolina's Geographic Information Coordination Council's online data portal (NC ONE MAP). Other data not found on the online web service were provided by Camden County. Data included are: wetlands, soils (septic limitations), flood zones, natural heritage areas, wastewater treatment plants, developed lands, major roads, water lines, sewer lines (future analysis only), and prime agricultural land (not included with CAMA guidelines). Procedurally, the process of the suitability analyses involved: defining the study area; collecting data as needed; preparing data for study area (i.e., clipping data to study area); preparing data for analysis (i.e., converting vector to raster data and then reclassifying the rastered data); running the analysis, rerunning the analysis as needed; and finally, analyzing and reporting results.

Four different land suitability analyses were created with three different weight schemes. weights were assigned to the various data layers based four objectives: (1) Create a suitability analysis based on CAMA guidelines for the South Mills Village Core; (2) Create a suitability analysis with heavy weights towards environmental impacts, including prime farmland which does not fall under CAMA guidelines; and (3) Create a suitability analysis for the Township of South Mills (including only environmental impacts: and (4) Create a future suitability analysis including sewer lines that are to be added to the Village Core in the future.

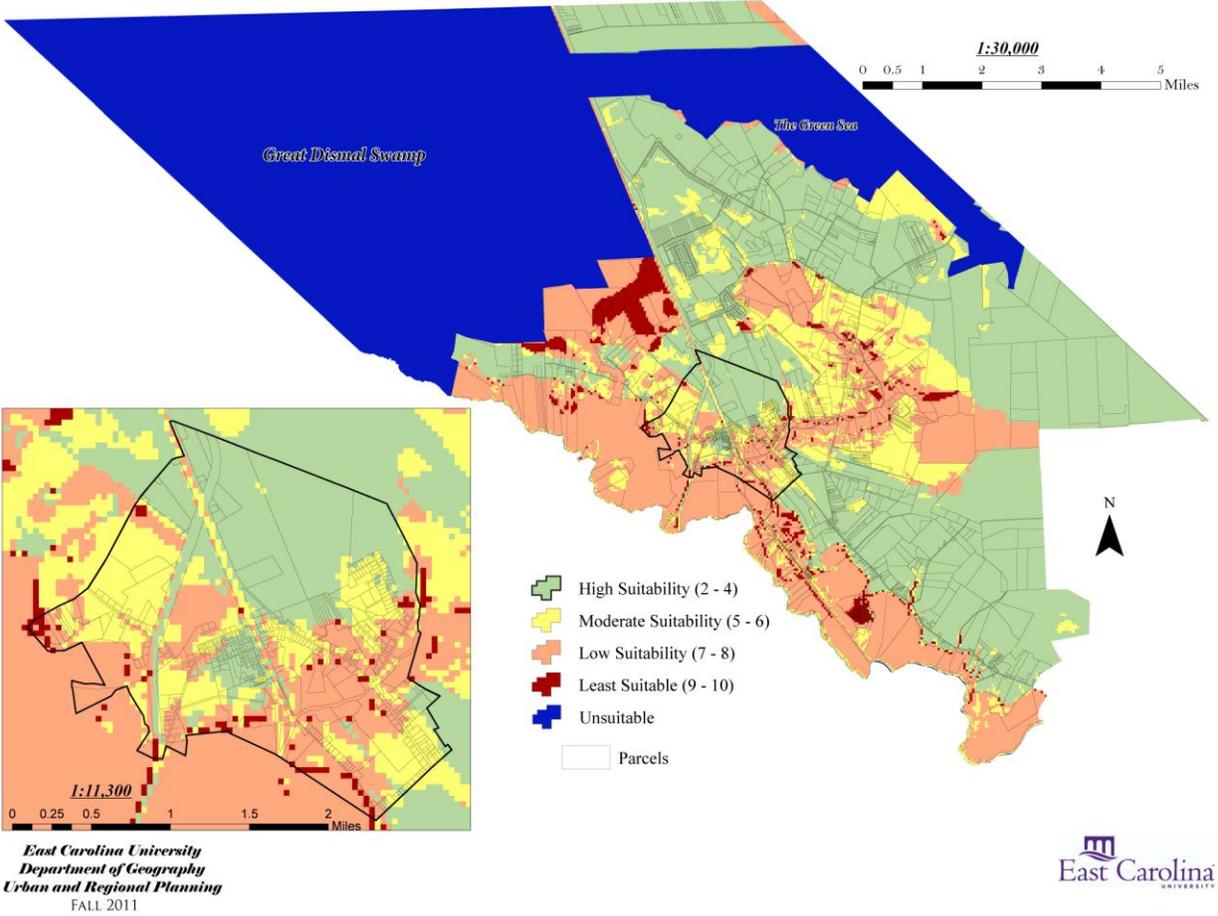
Table 1. Land Suitability Weights

Layer Name	Least	Low	Medium	High	Assigned Weight CAMA	Assigned Weight
	3	2	1	0		
Wetlands		Inside		Outside	1	3
Flood Areas		Inside		Outside	2	2
Soils (Septic Limitations)		Sever	Moderate	Slight	2	3
Natural Heritage Areas	Inside			Outside	1	2
Wastewater Treatment Plant		< 500 Feet		> 500 Feet	1	1
Developed Land		> 1 Mile	0.5 - 1 Miles	< 0.5 Miles	1	1
Roads		> 1 Mile	0.5 - 1 Miles	< 0.5 Miles	2	2
Water Lines		> 0.5 Miles	0.25 - 0.5 Miles	< 0.25 Miles	3	3
Sewer Lines		> 0.5 Miles	0.25 - 0.5 Miles	< 0.25 Miles	3	3
Prime Agricultural Land		Inside		Outside	2	2

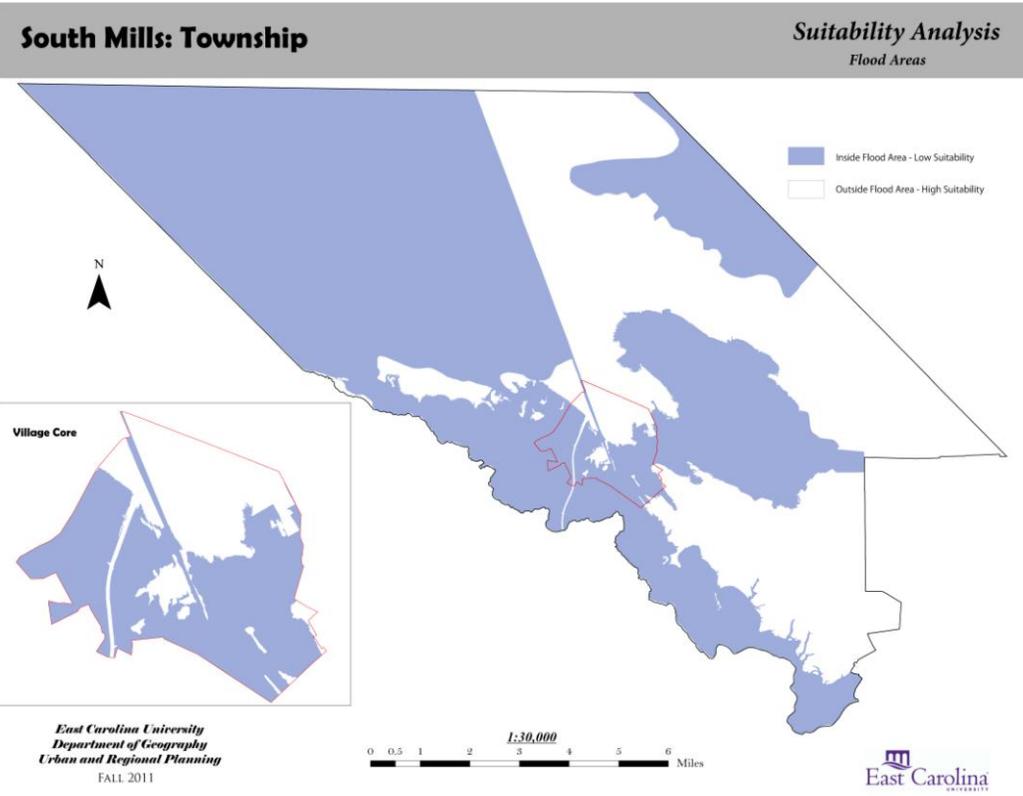
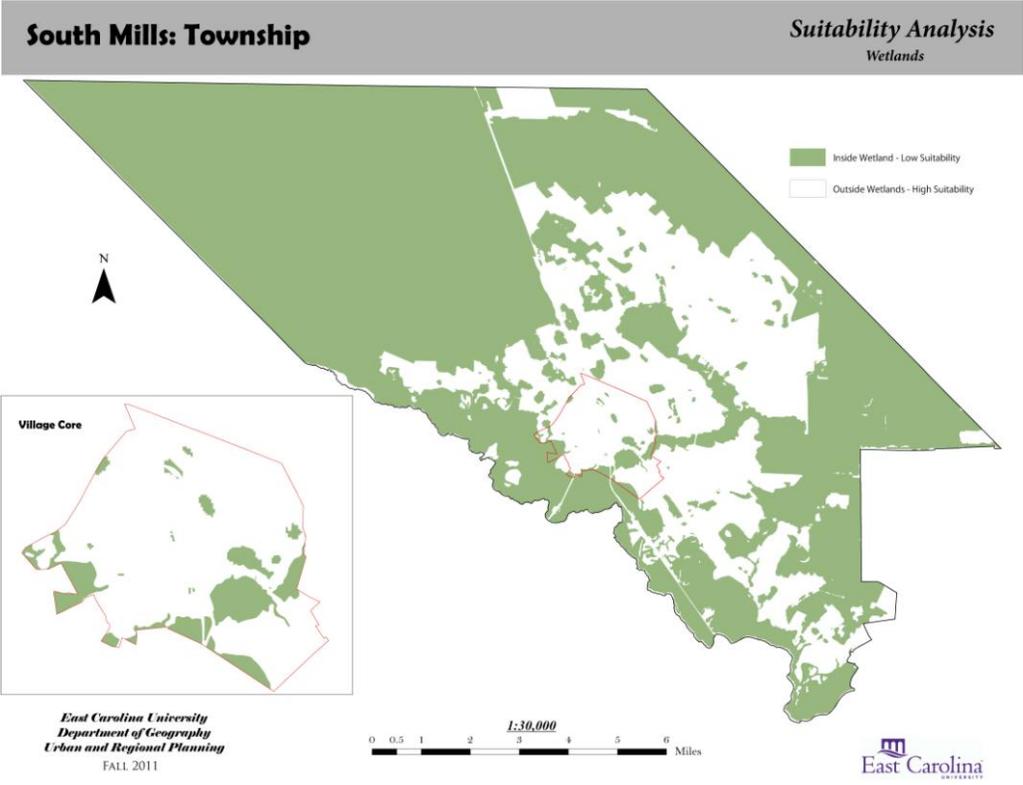
Source: Planning Team based on CAMA guidelines.

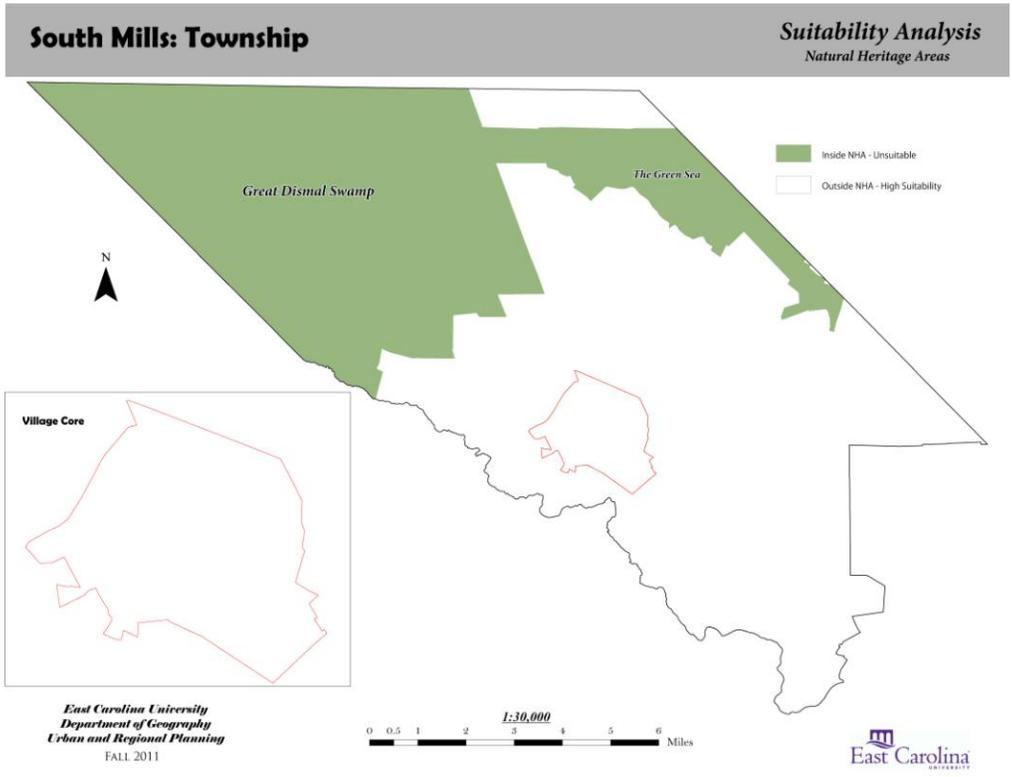
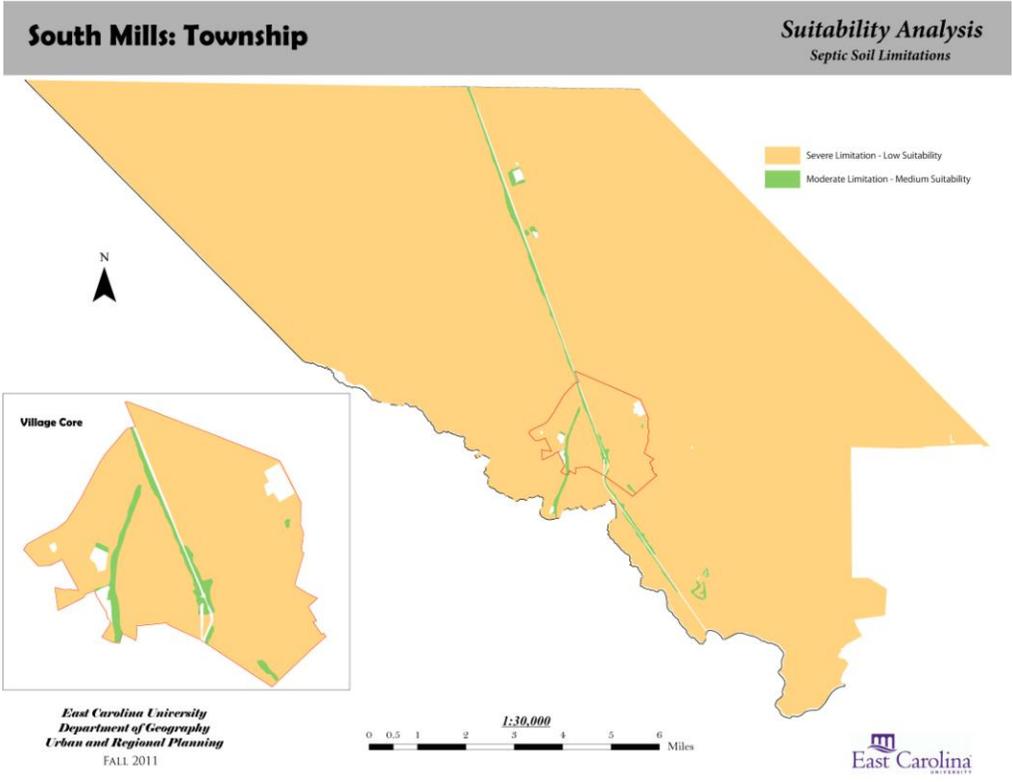
South Mills, NC : Township

Suitability Analysis
Environmental Composite



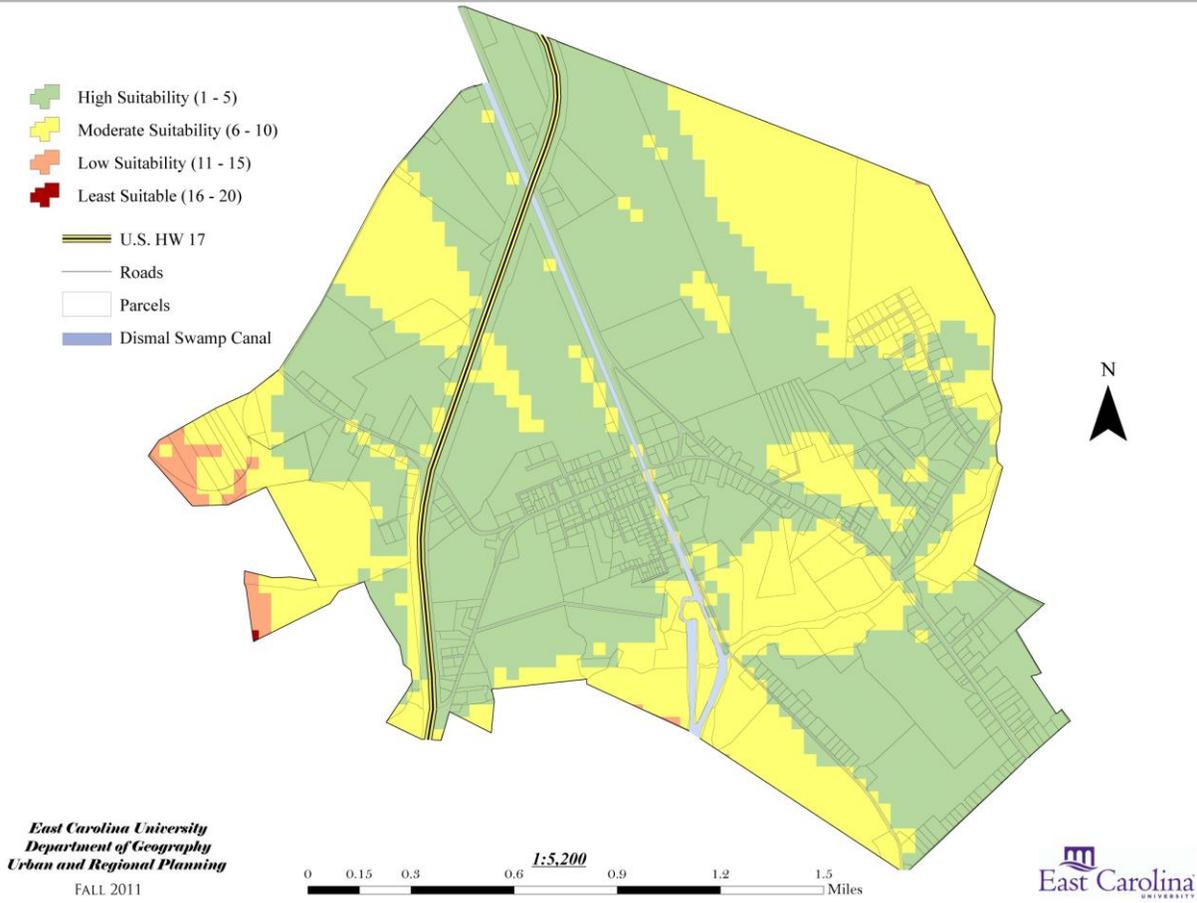
The map above provides an overall suitability analysis for the entire Township based on a composite of environmental layers. The study area boundary is included on the Township map. Note that the larger Township map also has a smaller inset map showing a closer view of the study area. Within the study area, the most suitable land lies east of the Dismal Swamp Canal in the northeastern quadrant. The only other area which shows high suitability is the core area mostly below Main Street west of the Dismal Swamp Canal, where the largest concentration of the village is located. There are concentrations of moderate suitability land west of U.S. Highway 17, east and west of the core, and in the southeast portion of the study area. Low suitability exists within the study area north of the core and also in the south and southeast parts of the study area. Within the study area, there are only scattered parcels mainly along riparian areas that are shown as least suitable for development. There is no land within the study area designated as “unsuitable” according to our land suitability method and map. However, within the entire Township, the Great Dismal Swamp and the Green Sea are shown on the map as unsuitable. Wetlands and flood prone areas comprise major limitations, as shown on the next two maps. Soil limitations for septic tanks apply to virtually the entire land area of the township, and natural heritage areas (2 more maps) show much of the Township is unsuitable for development.





South Mills, NC : Village Core

Suitability Analysis
CAMA Weights

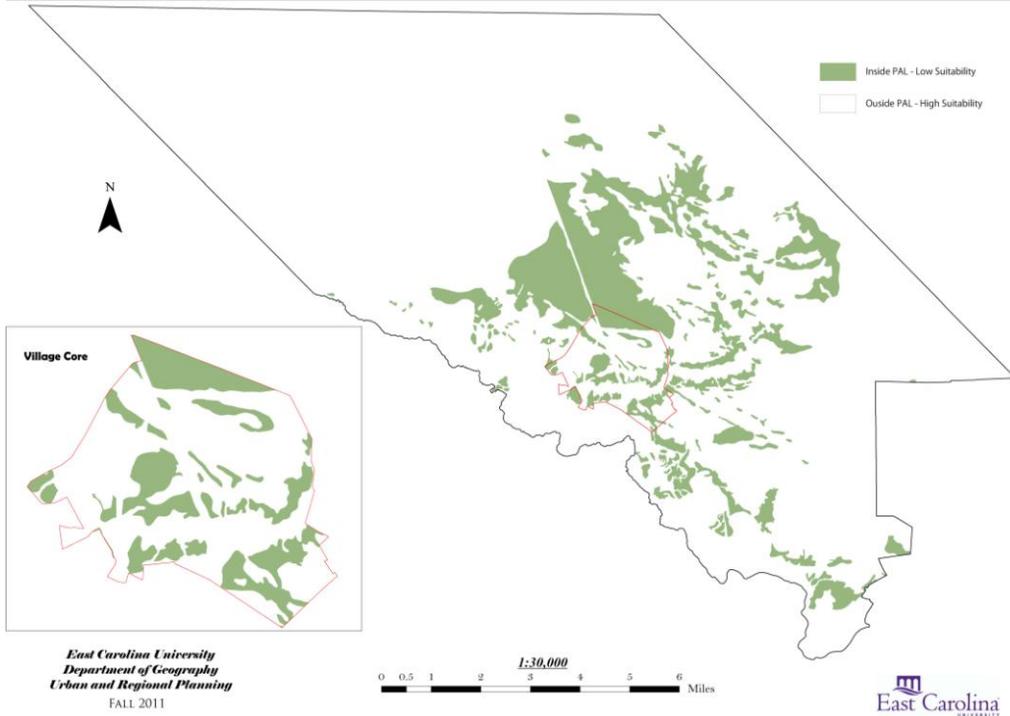


Using CAMA guidelines and weighting scales (map above), due to the existing development of roads, water lines, and developed parcels, the South Mills Village Core has a high suitability rating. The addition of sanitary sewer lines will make the land suitability even higher in the core area.

Utilizing another land suitability analysis method which weighs environmental factors more heavily than CAMA guidelines, more limitations appear (see map next page). The primary reason for greater limitations shown on this map is we have applied prime farmland (following map) as a land limitation criterion. The result of this method (i.e., applying heavy environmental weights including prime farmland) shrinks some of the amount of land shown as high suitability under CAMA weighted suitability. Small amounts of low suitability appear, but no areas are designated least suitable. If policymakers want to preserve as much prime farmland as possible within the study area, the following two maps will need to be followed as guiding principles for land use planning. In other words, land use planning that seeks to retain prime agricultural lands within the village study area should designate prime farmland areas as agricultural preservation and steer any residential development away from those farmland preservation areas.

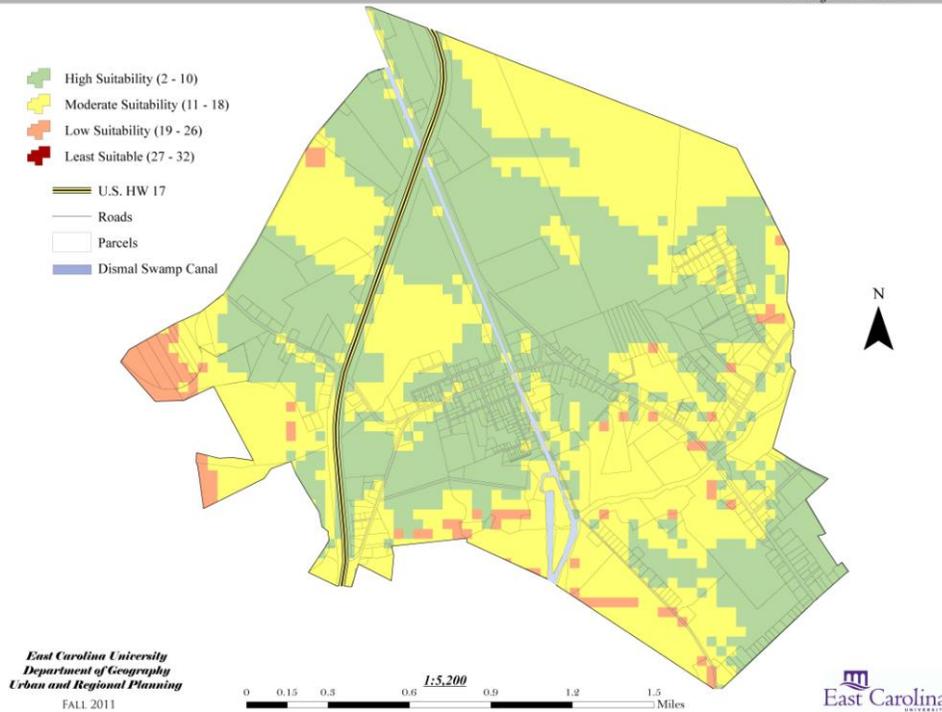
South Mills: Township

Suitability Analysis
Prime Agricultural Land

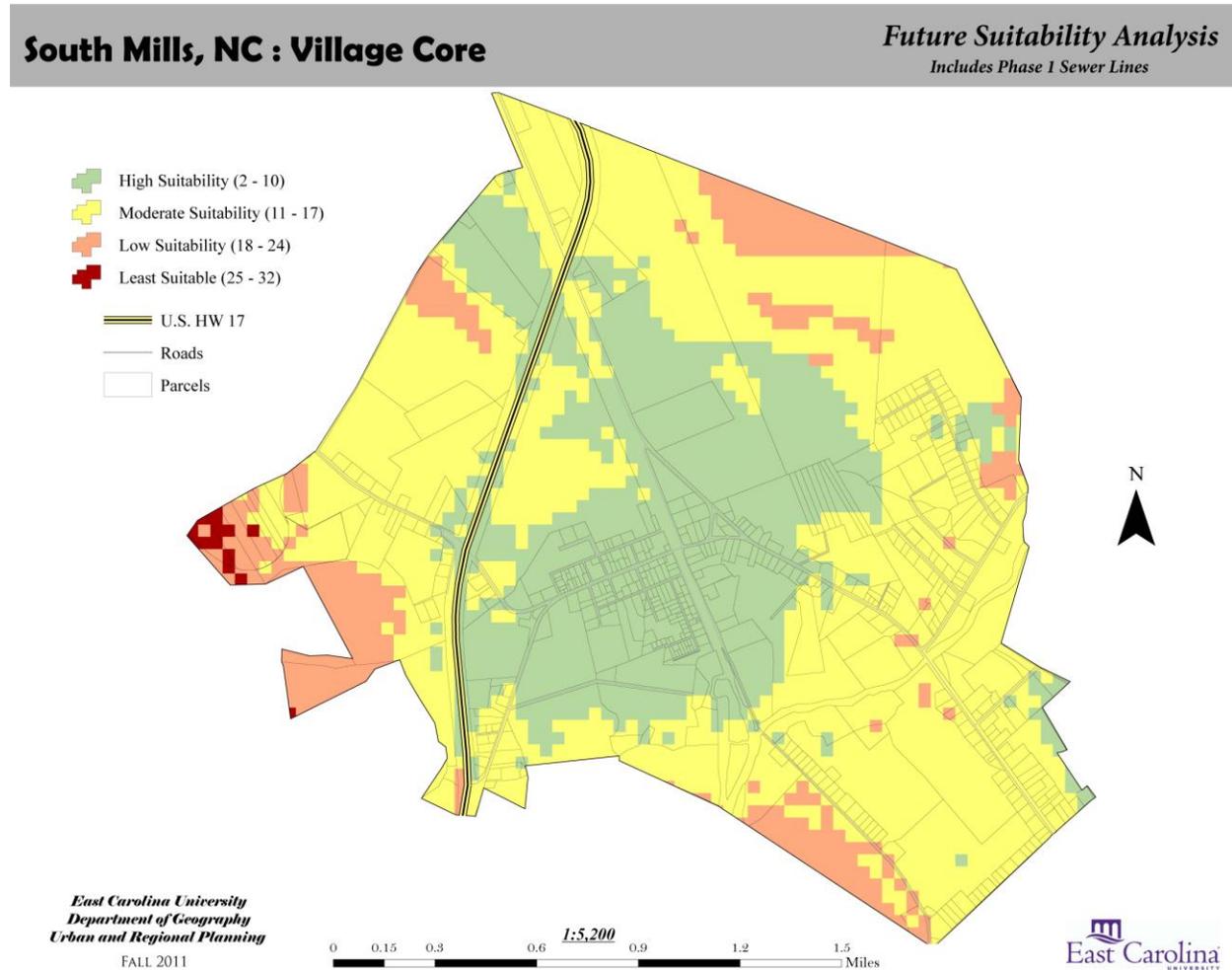


South Mills, NC : Village Core

Suitability Analysis
Heavy Environmental Weights
Including Prime Farmland

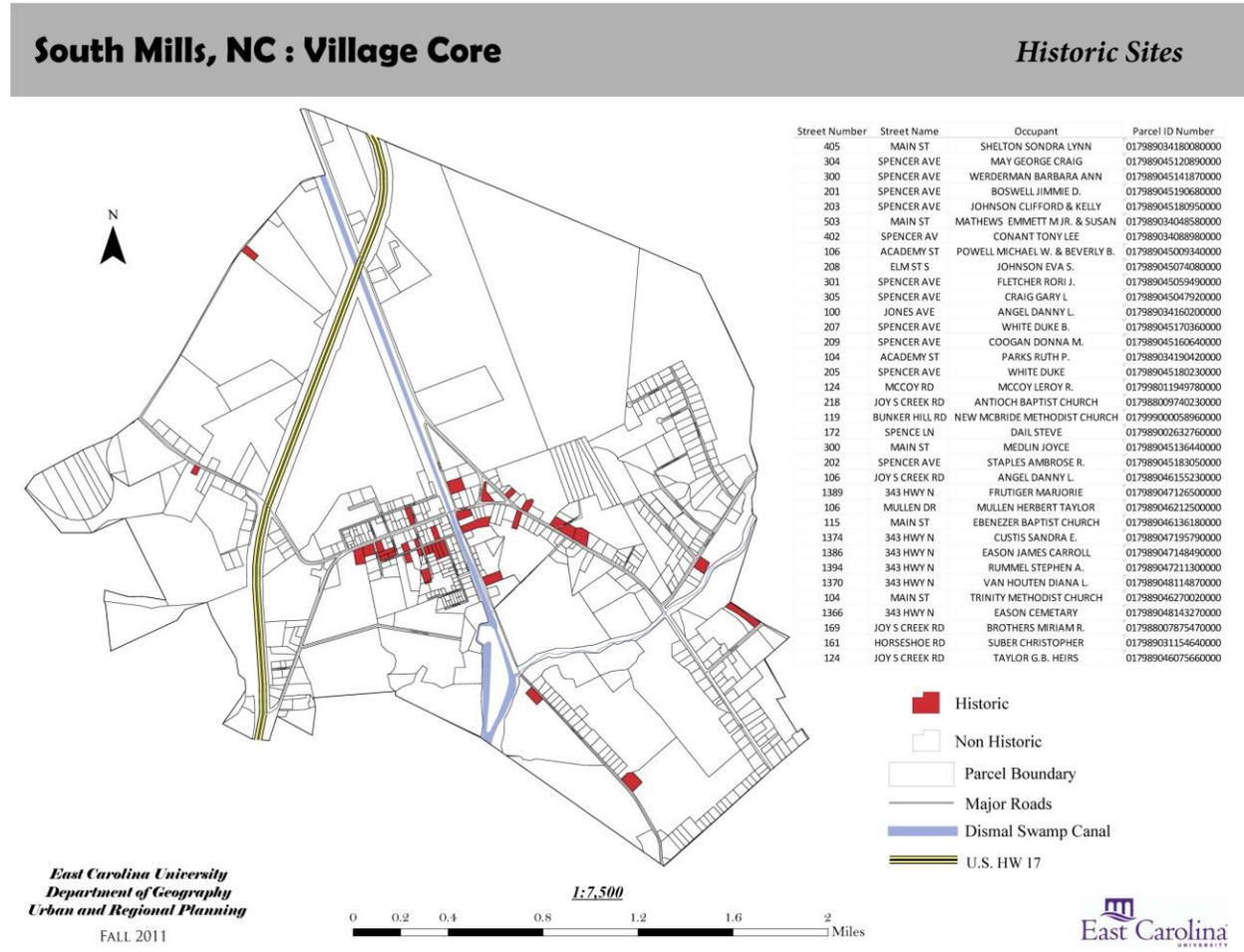
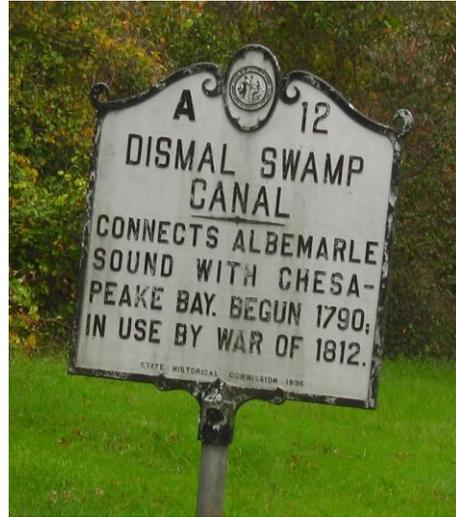


In conjunction with the other suitability analyses, a future analysis was created to predict land suitability with the addition of the proposed sanitary sewer system. The weights of the environmental factors were weighted slightly heavier to give the effect that parcels outside the areas of the future sewer lines are less suitable. As shown on the following map, the addition of sewer makes the community core with even more highly suitable for development. This future land suitability map was generated without inclusion of the prime farmland data layer, under the assumption that with sewer the preservation of farmland in the village core will not be an overriding objective of the plan.



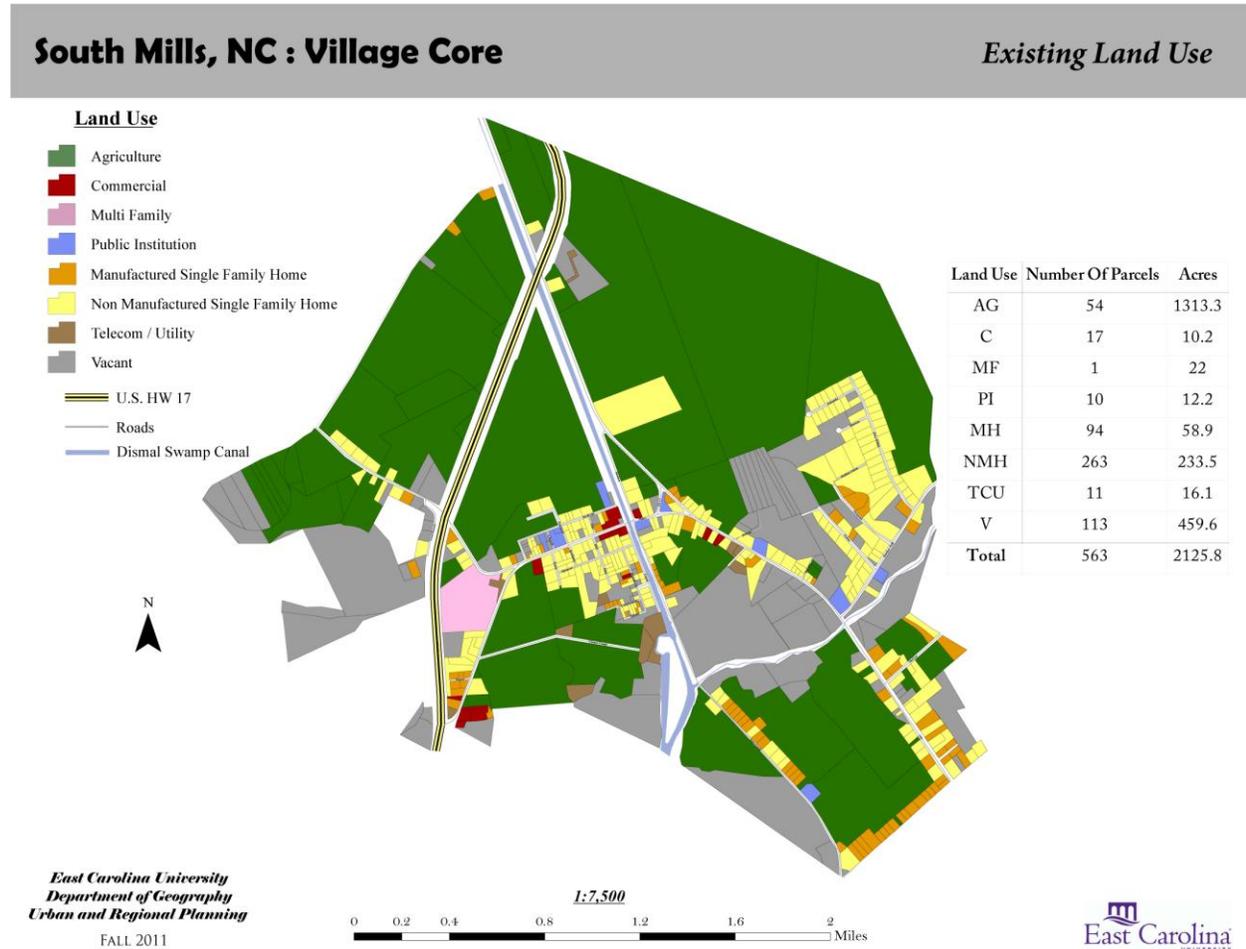
Historic Resources

The South Mills Village Core area is home to over thirty historic properties, including homes, churches and cemeteries. A majority of these sites are located on Main Street and Spencer Avenue. It is important to preserve these sites for their cultural heritage, which is important ultimately to the economic success and sense of place of the village. A map of historical sites is provided below, along with an inventory listing addresses, current owners, and parcel identification numbers.



Existing Land Use

The planning team completed an existing land use inventory for the village core study area, which constitutes 2,125.8 acres and 563 parcels (see existing land use map). The inventory results are shown graphically on an accompanying existing land use map made a part of this plan. Also, on the map, the number of parcels and acreages of land by land use are shown.



Currently a majority of the land in the South Mills study area is agricultural (1,313 acres), particularly the northern half of the South Mills study area, followed by vacant land (460 acres). Agricultural land lies mostly in sizable tracts and farms, although there are lesser-sized agriculturally used parcels immediately adjoin the core. This means that the conversion of agricultural land may be significant when sanitary sewer is extended to the core (and potentially beyond).



The largest concentrations of vacant land lie southwest of the core and another large vacant area west of U.S. Highway 17. A major share of the vacant land resides along Sawyer’s Creek, which is very susceptible to flooding.

The existing land use map divides residential land use into three types: non-manufactured single-family homes (“stick built”), single-family manufactured homes, and multi-family residential. Non-manufactured homes occupy 233.5 acres, or 11 percent of the study area. Manufactured homes (single-family, single-lot) are concentrated more in the southern part of the study area along roadways. The only multi-family residential land use in the South Mills Village Core is a manufactured home park off of Main Street near U.S. Highway 17.

Public Institutions, mainly churches, are scattered throughout the core area. Public-institutional development in the study area comprises only 12.2 acres. The existing land use map also shows the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property including the Dismal Swamp Canal lock as “telecommunications and utilities.”

Commercial land use currently consists of only 17 parcels on 10.2 acres. The most concentrated commercial area is found near the corner of U.S. Highway 17 and Main Street, where there is a grocery store, liquor store, and self storage units. Other commercial land use is located at the Village Core along Main Street between the canal and Elm Street. There is also a gas station on the east side of the canal as well as a produce stand on NC Highway 343. Clearly, the study area lacks a sufficient base of retail/service development needed and desired by the citizenry in South Mills.



**Main Street Commercial area
east of U.S. Highway 17**

Population and Housing

Camden County and its adjacent townships are growing at significant rate. According to the United States Census Bureau, Camden County had the third largest growth rate throughout North Carolina. Since 2000 there has been a 45 percent population change in Camden County, compared to an 18.5 percent change for the entire state. In just ten years (2000 to 2010), Camden County’s population grew from 6,885 to 9,980.

There has been a steady increase of family households throughout the region and while other factors in the demographic profile are important, the growth of the younger populations may say the most about the area. Not only will a large number of young people provide an economic base for the future, but they will also contribute to Camden County and South Mills’ evolution to a larger family-based community. In addition to an increase in family households and young people, South Mills and Camden County show a steady increase in racial diversity. Since 2000

there has been a steady increase in the minority population which adds to social and economic diversity. Lastly, the number of housing units has increased significantly since 2000, concurrent with demand of the growing population.

Streets and Sidewalks

The village of South Mills has a street system that is typical with many rural communities. It has two-lane roads with ditches on either side. The road system is not in a fully suitable state for development. The village street grid is incomplete, and some roads are not paved due to right of way issues. Bloodfield Road is partially paved, and one street section in the middle of the village has been left unpaved. The village's roads are narrow, with deep ditches along the side of the roads, presenting potentially unsafe conditions.

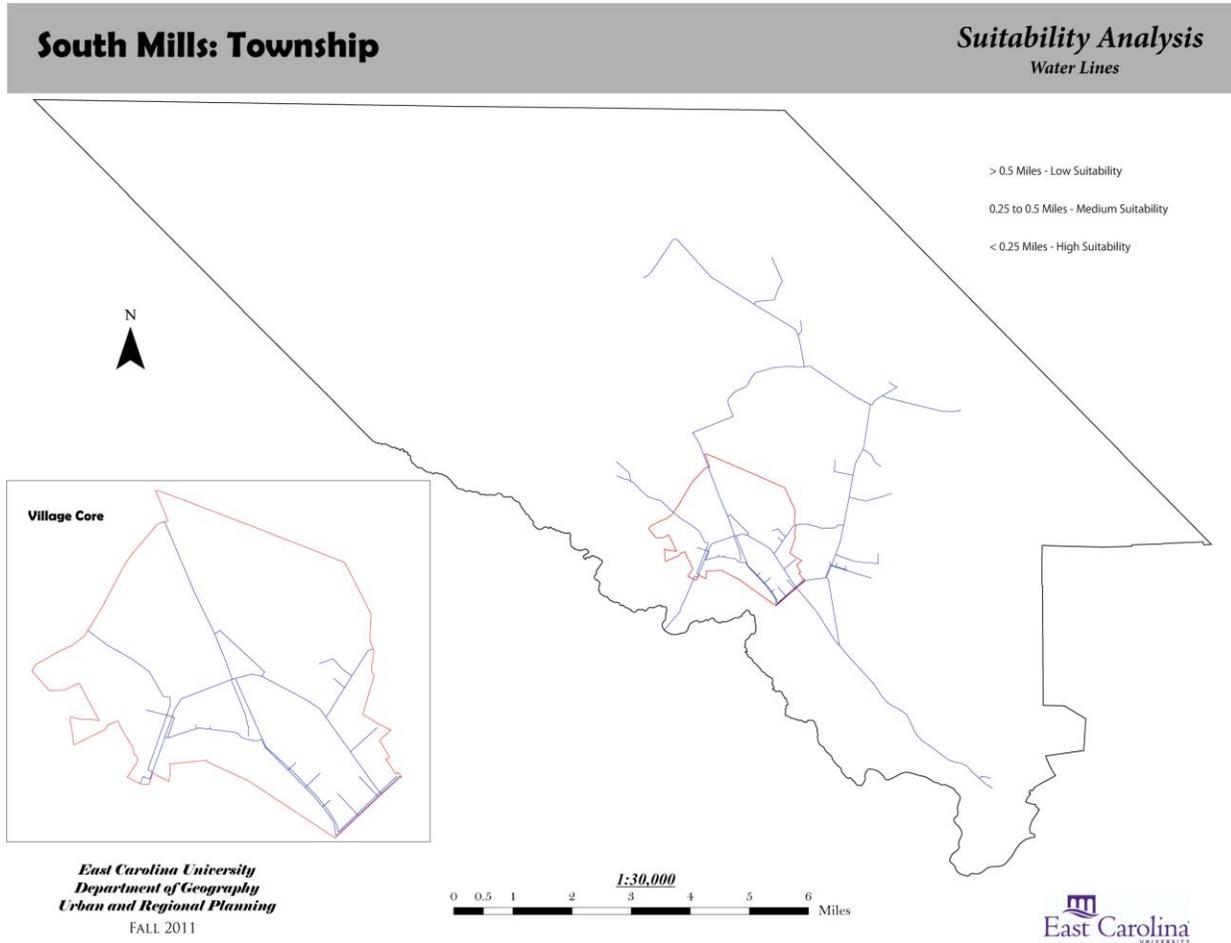


Main Street in South Mills Village: Existing Conditions

Sidewalks within the village are limited to a small area in front of the CITGO gas station and the commercial development across Main Street. The limited amount of sidewalks within the community core is in poor condition. The sidewalk is cracked in areas and is becoming overgrown with vegetation in the space in front of the vacant lot between the CITGO gas station and the canal. The pedestrian access over the drawbridge is limited to a narrow walkway on one side of the bridge. Overall the pedestrian access over the streets in South Mills is very limited, and in many places the only area to walk is on the street itself.

Water Lines

The map below shows existing water line coverage in the Township, which has an important bearing on land use planning.



Establishments

There were only 337 employees reported by Zip Code Business Patterns in 2009 in all of the South Mills Zip Code (27976), as indicated in Table 2. Many of South Mills' residents commute to Virginia for shopping, work, entertainment and other reasons. Approximately 24 percent of all Camden County workers commute to Chesapeake, Norfolk or Virginia Beach. This means that income is spent outside of the South Mills community core and goes to supporting other local economies. Currently there are two gas stations, a CITGO and BP which are located on either side of the draw bridge. J & E Oasis, a barber shop and the United States Postal Service Office are also located on Main Street. The ABC store, South Mills Super Market, and a storage facility are located at the other end of Main Street near U.S. Highway 17 Bypass.

Currently job opportunities are scarce throughout the South Mills area. This is partly due to a small population of the area which lacks buying power and labor to attract large commercial or industrial operations. The County’s largest employer is the Camden County Board of Education (250-499 employees). Rainbow Shops/ Ups N Downs and Blackwater Lodge & Training Center are also large employers (about 250 people each). Table 2 shows the total number of existing economic establishments, the number of paid employees, and payroll for the South Mills Zip Code (27976) for previous years. It also shows establishments by industry type. The data in Table 2 also show a remarkable increase in the zip code’s annual payroll between 2003 and 2009, which is a positive sign for economic development potential.

Table 2. Establishments in the South Mills Zip Code (27976), 2003-2009

All Establishments	2003	2005	2007	2009
Number of Establishments	28	34	37	30
Number of Paid Employees	134	174	260	337
First-Quarter Payroll	\$651,000	\$1,035,000	\$3,112,000	\$5,012,000
Annual Payroll	\$2,878,000	\$4,570,000	\$13,451,000	\$20,377,000
Establishments by Industry Type	2003	2005	2007	2009
Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	5	4	4	5
Utilities	1	1	1	1
Construction	6	10	10	4
Retail Trade	5	5	6	6
Transportation and Warehousing	1	1	1	1
Information	1	1	1	1
Professional, Scientific and Tech Serviced	1	1	2	1
Admin. and Support of Waste Mgmt	2	3	2	2
Educational Services	0	0	1	1
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	0	0	1	0
Health Care and Social Assistance	0	0	0	1
Other Services (except public admin)	6	7	10	9
Total for all Sectors	28	34	37	30

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Zip Code Business Patterns.

CHAPTER 3 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Demographic Changes

The demographics of Camden County and South Mills show the economic and social growth potential the area holds for the next few decades. With a steadily increasing younger population, South Mills will not only need increased infrastructure to support this growth, but also increased economic opportunity for the growing population.

Densification via Sewer – Implications for Economy and Housing

Currently the South Mills Village Core is served only by septic tank systems. A majority of these are found operating in soils with severe septic limitations. Septic tanks risk breakage and leakage, thus creating possible environmental concerns as waste could leak into the water table and the Dismal Swamp Canal. Because of such concerns, as well as the need for economic development, Camden County has begun a phasing process for a sanitary sewer system in South Mills. Sanitary sewer is planned to be available to the core. Indeed, a number of citizen support the plan and have already signed up to receive future sewer service. Sewer service is literally a “game changer” for South Mills.



Phase 1 Sewer to Village Core

With the construction of sewer lines within the South Mills core, there will be a greater potential for higher density commercial and multi-family residential developments. It is especially important to the South Mills Village Core to take advantage of what a sanitary sewer system has to offer, namely, the opportunity to bring some density and place characteristics to the village and a more compact, efficient, walkable village form. The community appears to be not very receptive to higher density residential development such as a large apartment complex, however, which may be quite possible upon making sanitary sewer available. Some smaller-scale multi-family residential development like townhouses may be appropriate within the community core, if appropriately designed and scaled to the village.

When sewer is extended to the core, this will facilitate and likely increase the prospect for infill development within the village core. Also, sewer may spur adaptive use of dilapidated or rundown buildings and areas of the village core. Infill development prospects for affordable housing will also increase with the extension of sanitary sewer. Vacant lots with sewer service could be used better by adding newer homes in a slightly tighter packed pattern than now exists in most of the core. Such village-style densification can be done in a way that remains

aesthetically pleasing by using context-sensitive zoning to blend the new and old developments together.

Furthermore, the “great house” concept would be an excellent design option for South Mills if it strives to accomplish efficient residential development densities on sewer in a character that matches the village. Great houses resemble larger single family homes; however, they are split into two or more discrete units and are technically multi-family residential units. The great house concept would allow for a building design that fits the “feel” of the village core.

Finally, potential densification with sanitary sewer provides the opportunity to accommodate the broadest range of housing needs. Group homes can be constructed for the elderly or disabled. And for those who are in between jobs or in and out of homelessness, transitional housing can provide a temporary shelter for those with physical, mental, or specific economic needs. As with the “great house” concept, such uses if permitted can provide living opportunities for all needy segments of the population and still be designed to fit in terms of compatibility with prevailing building designs in the core.

Capitalizing on the Dismal Swamp Canal

The most unique feature in South Mills is the Dismal Swamp Canal, which runs directly through the middle of the Village Core. The canal is the center piece around which a number of concepts revolve. Along with its historical importance, the canal is also used as a transportation route for boaters, traveling from Norfolk to points south as well as boaters who travel from northern states to southern states in the winter and from southern to northern states in the summer.



Two boats waiting for the Main Street Bridge to open in South Mills Village Core

Capitalizing on Heritage and Historic Resources

The South Mills Village Core has a significant number of historic properties, including Ebenezer Baptist Church and the Dismal Swamp Canal in addition to historic residences and historic farmstead homes. These sites plus original commercial structures along Main Street provide South Mills with unique, small town charm. However, over the decades much of the streetscape like sidewalks, street lights and street plantings (street trees and shrubs) have not been maintained, hurting the character of the village core. Heritage tourism should be a primary economic development strategy for the future success of South Mills.



Historic Church in South Mills Core Overlooking Dismal Swamp Canal

Placemaking and Beautification

South Mills does not have any significant destination to draw people into it. The core as it exists today does not provide an inviting atmosphere that will attract visitors and tourists. South Mills will need a place that is destination-oriented in order to succeed as an economic place. It needs to plan for a small commercial downtown with some amenities that will attract commercial patrons and tourists.

Beautification of the core area is also critical. Beautification would create a more inviting atmosphere that would attract more visitors to see all that South Mills has to offer like the many historic homes along Spencer Avenue. Spencer Avenue is another area which would likely benefit tremendously from improvements to the streetscape as well as from the creation of a historic district.

With the anticipated growth in population in northern Camden County, the South Mills Village Core has the potential to be an attractive, engaging destination if carefully planned with improvements such as those suggested in this plan. There are some signs that property owners are recognizing that potential, with such efforts as refurbishing commercial storefronts along Main Street.



Recent building improvement along Main St.

Economy and Major Development Approvals

In the near future, South Mills Township is likely to see a large amount of growth taking place. A large environmentally friendly, eco-industrial park will be located just north of South Mills village alongside U.S. Highway 17. That project has already received \$425,000 from the North Carolina Department of Transportation to begin construction of roads throughout the industrial park. The 100 acre industrial park is planned to be centered around a 33 acre pond and divided into 18 individual lots. This environmentally friendly eco-industrial park will be designed and intended to create a “harmonious mixture of industrial, commercial, institutional and residential development all located in a pristine natural environment with proximity to the Outer Banks beaches, Elizabeth City and metropolitan Hampton Roads area of Virginia,” so a county brochure indicates. The eco-industrial park will encourage large corporations and industries to build facilities near South Mills Village and will benefit South Mills and Camden County by increasing jobs, attracting new residents, and bolstering the local economy.

Located near the proposed eco-industrial park, only few miles north of South Mills Village, alongside U.S. Highway 17, a large development known as “Camden Plantation” is proposed and may begin construction when economic conditions improve. The developer is planning to build approximately 1,700 housing units, a golf course, a community center and many swimming pools. A development of this size will not only bring residents into the area but will also encourage a higher volume of traffic through the South Mills and may generate jobs as well. Schools may potentially be built within Camden Plantation to accommodate the increased school-age population. Construction jobs will be needed to build such a large development. The economy may see a dramatic increase in growth after such a large investment is made.

Land Suitability Issues

As described in detail in a separate chapter, development is constrained by a number of natural limitations such as wetlands, flood plains, soils unsuitable for septic tank use, and prime agricultural lands. The plan must be based on acknowledgement of these limitations.

Street Lighting

The public participation process revealed a desire among the citizenry for better lighting in the village core. Pedestrian lighting exists only in front of the vacant lot between the canal and the CITGO in the village core along Main Street. There is an opportunity to design and extend the pedestrian streetlight system as a part of placemaking efforts, as well as provide a more extensive street lighting system to promote public safety in the South Mills Village.



Main Street: Limited Pedestrian Lighting

Lack of Parks and Recreational Opportunities

Currently the closest park to South Mills is the Great Dismal Swap State Park. This provides the community with large amounts of passive parkland that provides a good place to walk, jog, and other activities. However, South Mills residents do not have access to active park facilities such as recreational leagues, football fields, and baseball fields. The closest such facility is approximately 13 miles away from the village according to residents. This lack of active recreational facilities suggests an opportunity to establish a park within the village that will not only include passive features but also active features such as a football field, baseball field, and a community center.

Drainage

A major concern among the stakeholders as expressed during the open house sessions is the stormwater management system, or lack thereof. Currently, in the South Mills Village Core, the drainage system consists of deep ditches on either side of the road that collects runoff. These ditches however, are not interconnected and do not direct the stormwater to collection ponds or other areas away from built structures. This creates potential flooding hazards, especially since the area is already prone to flooding. Clearly, a plan for the village core must successfully address these drainage issues.

Condition and Affordability of the Existing Housing Stock

Through low interest loans, housing rehabilitation programs can provide assistance to low-income homeowners that need to upgrade or repair their housing units. This is especially important to provide for elderly households on fixed incomes.

CHAPTER 4 PLAN FOR SOUTH MILLS CORE

Overall Vision

South Mills will be a village designed to maintain its rural, cultural and natural heritage, while evolving and growing according to sound planning principles. South Mills will improve its infrastructure, community core, economic development and recreational opportunities to increase the quality of life of its residents, businesses, institutions, and visitors. Future development through controlled growth will allow for the preservation of natural and historic resources while creating improved community character based around the community's evolving commercial core and the Dismal Swamp Canal.

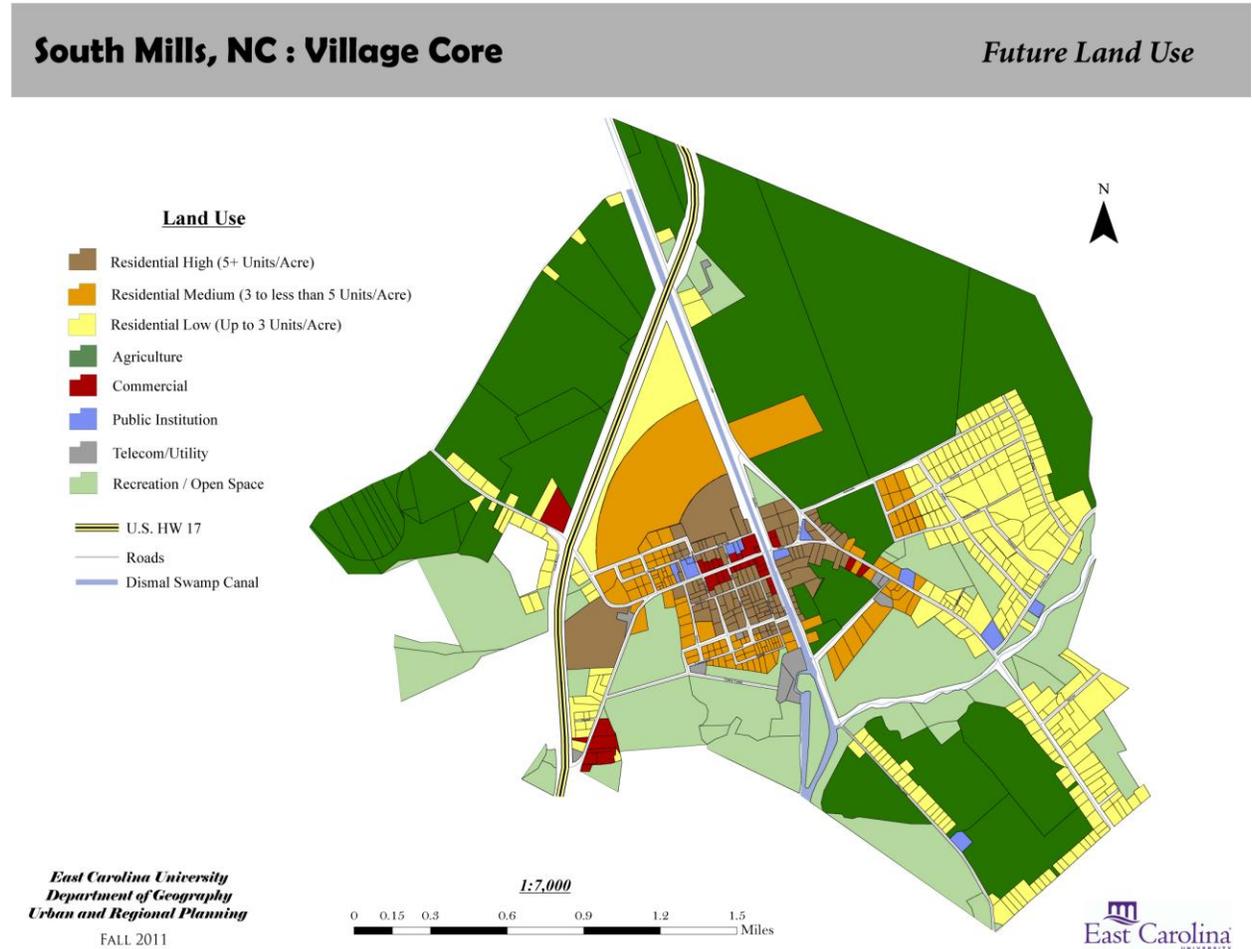
With the onset of infrastructure and concerted land use planning, South Mills will be able to take advantage of the family "feel" of the area, provide dwellings and jobs for increasing populations, and bolster its economic potential. It can evolve into the community it wants to be by providing reasonably priced dwellings in addition to building on the touristic potential of the area. The plan's main goal is to transform South Mills Village into its own economically sustainable community, while also enticing families to pursue all of their daily activities within the Township. The plan should provide opportunities for all income and racial segments of South Mills' existing and future population.

Currently, South Mills is more characteristic of a "bedroom" community, where the residents commute to other places for jobs. The local economy will evolve in a way that bolsters connections between South Mills Township and the highly profitable economic markets of southern Virginia's Hampton Roads. An overarching objective of this plan is to establish the centralized commercial core area of South Mills. The plan envisions the development of commercial uses along Main Street close to the Dismal Swamp Canal bridge. Developing the core around the Canal and Main Street area is important because it will emphasize the natural and historic features of the village core. The Canal, though already used to some extent, is not being used to its full potential. With proposals and ideas from this plan the South Mills Core Village can reach its potential. This chapter describes various components of the plan.

Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan map distinguishes between six different land use categories, including residential, agricultural, commercial, public-institutional, telecommunications/ utilities and open space. It is important that the plan address densification prospects, especially since the county is planning to add a sanitary sewer system to the Village Core. The existing land use map only distinguishes between medium and low density, however the future land use map shows three levels of density, high, medium and low. A buffer of a quarter mile was drawn from a center point at the intersection of Main Street and the Dismal Swamp Canal to establish the basis for the densest concentration of development activity. Any residential parcel that falls within this boundary is designated for high density. It is noted that the only parcel outside that buffer that also is designated for high density residential is the existing manufactured home park on West Main Street. Medium density residential development is recommended by the plan between the

one-quarter mile and one-half mile buffer from the same center point. Any residential parcel that fall outside the quarter mile buffer and inside the half mile buffer is designated for medium density. Any remaining parcels that lie outside of the one-half mile buffer are designated low-density residential with the assumption that sewer service will not be available during a 20-year planning horizon.



Future commercial land use has been designated for all parcels along Main Street from Academy Street to the canal bridge and then one and half blocks south of the bridge along Canal Street. Designation of commercial in these areas is critical in order to bring a destination-oriented, pedestrian friendly commercial village core to fruition. The future land use plan thus prioritizes bringing commercial growth to the Village Core which will stimulate rings of residential development and decreasing densities as land is less accessible to the core.

Existing agricultural lands as shown on the existing land use map will change relatively little based on the future land use plan map; agriculture will still exist and be preserved in outlying portions of the village study area. Many vacant lands will become filled in over time with residential development made possible with road network extensions, as shown on the future land use map. Much of the vacant land along Sawyers Creek is prone to flooding and has been designated as open space.

Another change inherent in the future land use plan include the designation of public institutional lands along McBride Street at the Elm Street intersection. Acquiring land for the proposed Village Marina (discussed below) necessitates that the existing Masonic Lodge on McBride Street be discontinued at its current location, perhaps being moved to or reestablished at another location.

Small Marina and Passive Park at Dismal Swamp Canal

There is strong potential to create a destination in the South Mills core north of the bridge on the west side of the canal. Boaters already tend to stop in the canal in South Mills. Some of them have to wait for the locks to operate, leaving idle time. Boaters need a place in South Mills to pull up and spend their leisure time. Other recreationalists who use the canal would also benefit from a small marina with amenities and a passive park in the heart of the Village core.

Hence, the idea is to create a small marina type facility with waterfront park and retail, restaurant and possibly even lodging. The marina, if constructed, would become a major attraction in the core, bringing people out for social interaction. Provision of a small marina off of the canal in South Mills would allow boaters to stop, freshen up, explore the village, grab a bite to eat and then head out on their way. The South Mills Village Marina is a unique, preferred way to take full advantage of the Dismal Swamp Canal. The small marina and park will act as place for travelers to stop and freshen up by getting something to eat at one of the proposed restaurant/coffee shop businesses located in the commercial core abutting the marina. The development plan also features higher density residential units (townhouses) overlooking a village green and with view to the marina and canal. Hence, new townhouse development will turn its face to the water and village green features. The marina, abutting commercial core, and village green will entice visitors to visit South Mills, and once there the plan envisions they will also be able to walk around the South Mills village core to view historic sites. Commercial businesses along Main Street (discussed in more detail in the next section) will also provide additional places for visitors to shop and eat.

The planning team has illustrated this concept using Google Sketch-Up. While we do not dismiss the challenges of permitting in the regulatory environment to get the marina approved, the marina would have minimal impact on the environment since the Dismal Swamp Canal already exists with locks and bulkheads. The engineering to accomplish the marina would be relatively simple and could include docking and space for boats to pull up and have a place to come eat and enjoy the passive park and surrounding village core amenities as called for in this plan.



**Proposed Marina, Village Green, Retail Center and Townhouses
(Dismal Swamp at the Bottom of Sketch)**





Commercial Main Street Development

There are only a few businesses in the core of the village. The community needs and supports additional retail development which should be developed in a concentrated fashion along Main Street primarily west of the canal. The future land use plan map shows how this commercial community core envisioned for South Mills should be developed in relation to the proposed marina park. The plan for the South Mills community core includes a revitalization and remaking of the Main Street area into a small downtown for the village.



Main Street Existing (Looking West)

From 50,000 to 100,000 square feet of retail shops, restaurants and offices will be added in the Main Street area and at the marina site. This addition of a commercial core will give residents of South Mills more shopping and dining options and thus avoid the perceived problem of having to drive longer distances to access these services. There is already some evidence of a trend toward property owners renovating storefronts or converting residential structures to commercial and office land uses. A vibrant community core is necessarily to encourage economic growth and will be vital to the success of the village's future economy. Commercial development along Main Street is considered essential, since current economic conditions are not sustainable for growth and will not accommodate the needs of citizens in the future.

Attention will need to be given to streetscape improvements in support of commercial Main Street development. Implementing plans to improve sidewalks and the overall streetscape along Main Street will allow visitors to stroll the village core and enjoy all that the South Mills Village Core has to offer.

Grid Street Pattern Additions to the Village

One of the main objectives of this plan is to ensure development in the South Mills Village Core is done in a way that extends the existing fabric and character of the village. In this sense, the local street network needs to be extended as additional development and infill development occur. There are currently many dead end streets and streets that are only partially paved, which results in poor connectivity and difficulties with infill development of underutilized parcels. Extension of the road network will allow for such infill development as well as better accessibility to different sections of the core area. With increasing population and the village's future of adding a sanitary sewer system, the core area must have an appropriate road network to accommodate growth. Recommended additions to the village grid street network are illustrated on the future land use plan.

Drainage

This plan suggests that drainage issues might be addressed by engineering a more formalized system of drainage ditches to flow into the lower PUD park area, which is proposed to be designed with a lake (stormwater pond with amenity features) at the lowest elevation in the village core. Constructing such a system and connecting it to the lake/stormwater pond would allow for water to flow naturally to the lowest elevation. Any spillover from the lake could be designed to flow into adjacent wetland areas. There is also a channel proposed to run from the lake/stormwater pond to Turners Cut, just below the Dismal Swamp Canal Locks. If this improvement is completed, it will allow further drainage to flow into the river system in addition to providing boat, canoe, and kayak access to the park area.

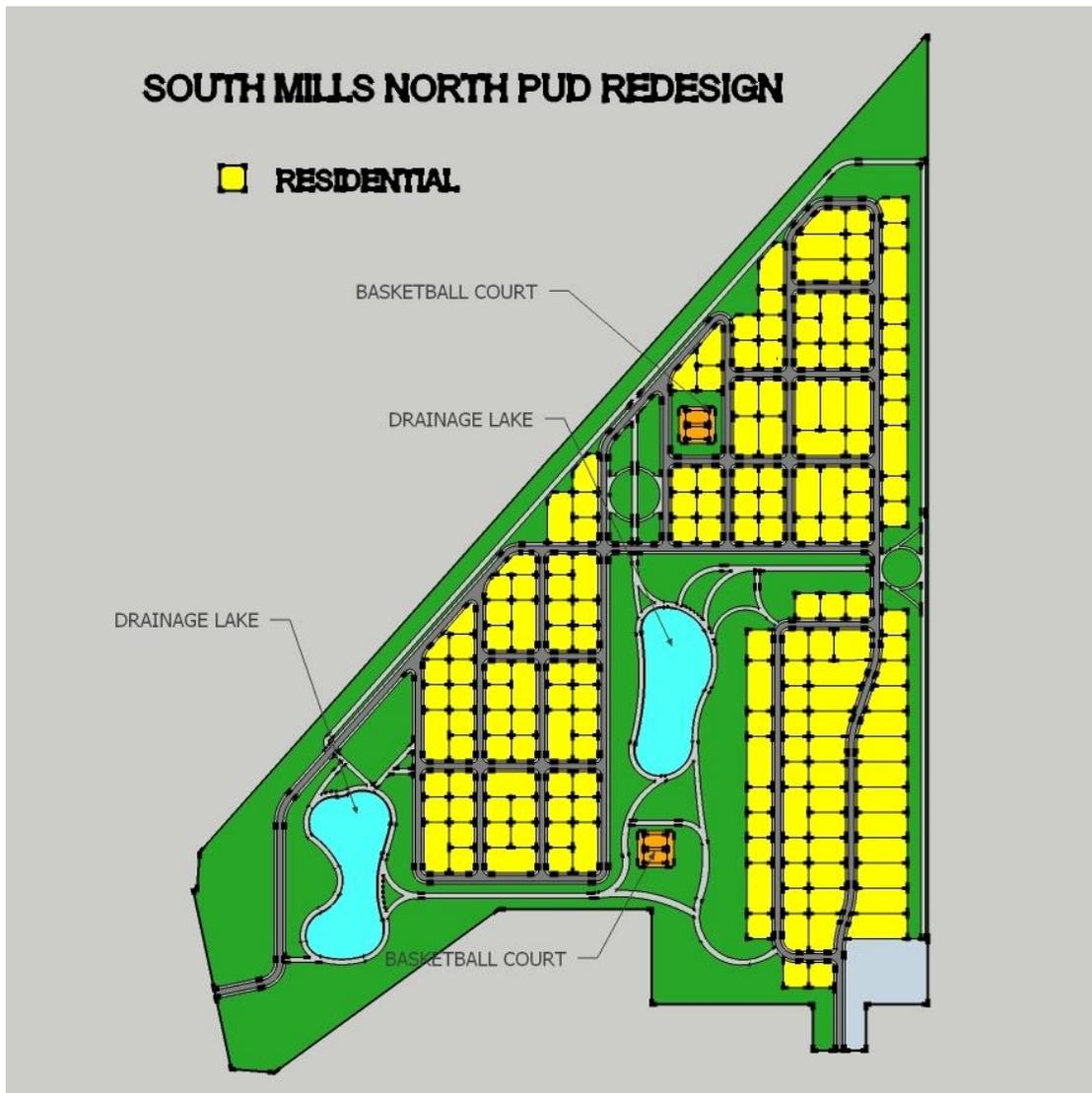
Active and Passive Countywide Park

This plan recommends an active and passive park at the location of a previously approved (but not developed) Planned Unit Development in the village core. This property is the lowest elevation in South Mills, and the park site will consist of a lake which will be a stormwater management pond, but one designed to be an amenity to the park. That lake will also include a canal extension to the river below the locks in South Mills. Our team has recommended a concept design for this proposed park site, as illustrated in the figure below.



Redesign of North Planned Unit Development

A Planned Unit Development has been approved on a large property on the north end of the village core, but it has not been developed. The curvilinear design of the approved PUD is considered incompatible with the basic character of South Mills Village and could result in two separate divisions of South Mills, old and new. This small area plan recommends that the earlier approved plan for that site be redesigned as a neighborhood that fits the existing street grid structure of South Mills. It goes one step further and provides a conceptual redesign (below) of that vacant land in a design favoring traditional neighborhood development rather than curvilinear, suburban-style conventional development.



This conceptual redesign if pursued as recommended would maintain the grid-pattern street network found in the historic South Mills Village Core area. Diverse lot sizes of one quarter- and one half-acre lots are aimed not only at filling more than one market niche but allowing for some

mixture of housing opportunities. Adequate green space and drainage lakes are included in the conceptual redesign to address needs for stormwater management and recreation. This redesign also accommodates the proposed site for the South Mills Village Marina (southeast corner).

Dismal Swamp Trail Connection to South Mills Core

Currently the Dismal Swamp Trail begins just over a mile north of the South Mills Village Core area. A trail extension into the South Mills Village Core would attract more visitors to the area who would be able to witness South Mills' historical and cultural uniqueness. Preliminary design of the trail already exists, but some of it runs right along the highway right of way. The trail needs to be off the highway if possible, though design options are extremely limited. This plan recommends pursuit of such a connection. The extension of the Dismal Swamp Trail is proposed to also connect to the marina, thereby allowing accessibility from park to park. The connection may also attract tourists passing through either going north or south on U.S. Highway 17.



Southern Terminus of Dismal Swamp Trail

Heritage Design and Wayfinding Theme

South Mills should capitalize on its rich history including the canal and civil war history, including the Battle of South Mills. Only limited interpretive signage is presently installed. The economy of the area will be enhanced with a focus on heritage tourism. A systematic approach is needed to establish an overall design for signage in the area relating to historic structures and the village generally.



Signage is Needed at U.S. Highway 17 and Main Street to Identify the South Mills Village Core to passing motorists, but advertising needs proper control to maintain this rural, forested corridor.

Street Lighting

Stakeholders have asked for better street lighting. Street lights will not only bring character to the Village Core (if pedestrian- scale lighting is installed) but add security at night. Street lights should be added first along the two-block commercial Main Street area and also Spencer Street, where there are a number of historic homes and sites.



Land Use Regulations

Currently South Mills falls under the Title XV, Chapter 151 of the Camden County Code, adopted January 1st, 1998 for all land use regulations. The code consists of several stand-alone ordinances including revisions to the 1972 zoning ordinance which were passed in 1990 and 1993. A majority of the land is zoned for low density residential and agricultural land. Decisions of zoning regulations and subdivisions are made by the Camden County Board of Commissioners after review and recommendation by a Planning Board. Regulations address streets and sidewalks, parking, landscaping and shading requirements, utilities, open space and schools, planned unit developments, special uses, flood plain management, drainage, stormwater management, and signage.

This plan strongly urges altering the current land use policies to accommodate the ideas in this document. Alterations needed include revisions of standards for land use, zoning, streets, sidewalks, landscaping and street lighting, drainage and storm water management, open space/park areas, and planned unit developments. Alterations of land use regulations also need to be made to accommodate development anticipated to connect to the proposed sanitary sewer system.

Specifically, in relation to current zoning, this plan proposes several of the following changes: removal of the industrial zoning from the Village Core; higher density development permissions upon the extension of sewer; and removal of the highway commercial zoning designation from the core area. Furthermore, most vacant parcels should be designated for single family residential use where adjacent to existing single family homes. And open space zoning designations should be assigned to parcels that are prone to flooding or fall within wetland areas. See also the specific recommendations for re-designating development permissions on the previously approved north Planned Unit Development in the village core.

Policies

1. **Village Character.** Maintain the village-like character of the South Mills core and surroundings.
2. **Agricultural Greenbelt around Village.** Guard against inappropriate conversion of agricultural lands to suburban development that would weaken the surrounding open space setting within which the South Mills Village exists. This also means maintaining areas designated as agricultural and prime agricultural lands within the village but outside the village core as agricultural.
3. **Land Suitability.** Limit development to those areas that are suitable as shown via land suitability analyses in this small area plan. Prohibit development from occurring in areas designated as unsuitable or least suitable for development as indicated in this plan.
4. **Zoning Decisions and Plan Consistency.** Carefully consider future zoning decisions in light of the future land use plan for the South Mills Village, and make sure they are consistent with adopted policies of this plan and the density and land use recommendations of the future land use plan.
5. **Extension of Street Grid.** As additional development and infill development occur in the village, ensure that the local street network is extended in a grid pattern as illustrated on the future land use plan map.
6. **Marina, Village Green, and Central Core Development.** Pursue a public-private partnership to achieve the vision for development of a marina, village green, and central core development consisting of commercial uses and townhouses.
7. **Main Street Commercial.** Pursue a public-private partnership to develop two blocks of Main Street-style commercial development in the village core, including appropriate sidewalk and streetscape improvements.
8. **Historic Resources Protection.** Encourage the preservation of all worthy historic structures and sites in the Village. Consider a local historic district for protection of existing historic resources as appropriate.
9. **Higher Density Residential Development.** Do not authorize stand-alone apartment complexes in the village, but permit townhouse development abutting the proposed village green and other locations within areas designated for high-density development on the future land use plan. Encourage pursuit of the “great house” concept to ensure that any higher density residential development is compatible with the existing fabric and character of the village.
10. **Substandard Housing Stock.** Encourage the upgrade or rehabilitation of existing housing units that are substandard or dilapidated.

Short-term Work Program, 2012-2016, South Mills Village

Topic	Work Program Item	Target Year	Cost Estimate	Responsible Party and Funding
General	Incorporate this small area plan draft into the countywide comprehensive plan and seek adoption after appropriate additional public input	2012	Budgeted in comprehensive plan update	Staff; Clarion Group (Consultant)
General	Report on progress made toward implementation of this small area plan	Annually	Staff	Camden County Planning Department and Planning Commission
Regulation	Amend zoning map and regulations as applicable to South Mills Village as appropriate to implement the plan	Ongoing	Staff	Camden County Planning Department and Planning Commission
Land Acquisition	Pursue the acquisition of land needed for marina, active/passive park.	Ongoing	Unknown; Staff	Camden County Planning Department and Planning Commission
Infrastructure	Implement sanitary sewer extension to South Mills core per schedule	Ongoing	Staff	Camden County Board of Commissioners
Infrastructure	Conduct preliminary engineering concept for developing marina off of Dismal Swamp Canal	2013	\$30,000	Camden County Board of Commissioners; public-private partnership
Permitting	Pursue environmental compliance for marina with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources	2014	\$75,000	Camden County Board of Commissioners; public-private partnership
Signage	Prepare wayfinding design for signage in village area; install directional sign at Main St. and U.S. Highway 17	2014	\$10,000	Local architect or designer (consultant)
Infrastructure	Conduct preliminary engineering for a formalized drainage system in village core	2014	\$35,000	Camden County Board of Commissioners; Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
Housing	Initiate a program of low-interest loans or public assistance to upgrade or rehabilitate substandard or dilapidated housing units.	2015	Unknown	Camden County Planning Department; state agency assistance
Historic Resources	Consider appropriateness of establishing one or more historic districts in Village Core.	2015	\$10,000	Planning Dept.; grant from state for historic resources inventory
Infrastructure	Develop a Main Street commercial streetscape plan including sidewalks and pedestrian scale street lights (2-3 blocks)	2016	\$15,000	Planning Dept.; funding needed for design consultant
Streets	Repairs, paving, resurfacing, right-of-way acquisition, sidewalk repair, curbing, landscaping, streetscape improvements; street lighting	Annually	As may be budgeted	Camden County Board of Commissioners
Trails	Construct extension of Dismal Swamp Trail into South Mills core	2016 or Long Range	As may be budgeted	As may be budgeted

Long Range Capital Projects List

1. Main Street streetscape improvements.
2. Marina and village green development.
3. Lake and road construction and park development at active/passive park site.
4. Drainage connections and collectors to lake.