

THE CHARLESTON WATER PLAN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Developed by the Coastal Conservation League, this guide is meant to help you understand the types of projects and design strategies that are being proposed in your neighborhood, as well as relevant work the Coastal Conservation League is doing to support resiliency efforts in your basin.

WHAT IS IT?

In 2024, the City of Charleston's Mayor's Office of Resilience and Sustainability released its Comprehensive Integrated Water Plan, also known as the Charleston Water Plan. The purpose of the Water Plan is to provide a long-term planning guide for the city to live with water in the face of rising sea levels and development pressure. The plan is organized into five planning areas: the Peninsula, West Ashley, James Island, John's Island, and Daniel Island and Cainhoy.

HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

Using the Dutch Dialogues as a foundation, the city developed design strategies that will guide the implementation of the projects identified in the Water Plan. These strategies include adapting to water, defending against storm surges, and preserving natural ecosystems. Rounding out the plan are specific area-based projects, adaptive management strategies, and policy recommendations that build upon the design strategies.

WHAT'S NEXT?

To support the implementation of the Water Plan, the city has recently formed a Basin Flood Action Committee. The committee includes representatives from each of the five key planning areas and will help prioritize and implement projects identified in the plan, including projects like the battery extension/perimeter protection.



The Water Plan is
presented as an online
ArcGIS storyMap.
[Explore the map here.](#)



WATER PLAN STRATEGIES FOR THE PENINSULA

The Water Plan’s vision for the Peninsula includes two primary strategies: increasing perimeter protection and adapting open systems. The perimeter protection is proposed to surround much of the lower Peninsula and is more widely known as the Battery extension. Outside of the Battery extension, communities like Rosemont, Bridgeview, and Wagener Terrace are expected to pursue other adaption actions, such as raising roads and elevating buildings. The Conservation League has been involved in projects related to the redevelopment of Union Pier, zoning code rewrites and the Lowcountry Lowline.

WATER PLAN STRATEGIES FOR WEST ASHLEY

The Water Plan recognizes that West Ashley is already at risk for flooding and storm surge around its riverine edges. Many of the strategies include raising roads and homes, improving drainage, and embracing greenspace conservation in low-lying areas. The principal project for West Ashley is known as the “Blue Crescent.” This project seeks to strategically connect tributaries of the Stono and Ashley Rivers to better store and drain water in low-lying areas. The Conservation League has been involved in Highway 61 improvements, zoning code rewrites, and enforcing the urban growth boundary.

WATER PLAN STRATEGIES FOR JAMES ISLAND

Neighborhoods along the edge of James Island will need to devise individual community plans to adapt to rising waters. In anticipation of sea level rise, key roads on the island, such as Folly Road and Fort Johnson Road, could be raised or reinforced. The plan acknowledges the complexities of multiple municipal services on James Island and suggests consolidating these services or increasing coordination to best serve residents in this dynamic island community. The Conservation League is involved in the Rethink Folly Road initiative, opposing the I-526 expansion, and successful Greenbelt funding projects like Mill Point Park.

WATER PLAN STRATEGIES FOR JOHNS ISLAND

Much of the Water Plan proposes to maintain Johns Island’s rural character by protecting forested wetlands and allowing for marsh migration corridors along the Stono River edge. Future development should be concentrated along the highest ground on the island – the Maybank Highway Corridor. Conservation and enhancement of existing creeks will help store and drain stormwater on the island. The Conservation League advocates for tree protection, enforcing the Urban Growth Boundary, and resilient subdivision design.

WATER PLAN STRATEGIES FOR DANIEL ISLAND AND THE CAINHOY PENINSULA

Low-lying neighborhoods on Daniel Island will need to work together to adopt Community Adaption Plans in anticipation of rising sea levels. On the Cainhoys Peninsula, drainage pathways will need to be preserved, as well as corridors for marsh migration. The Water Plan acknowledges the risk for flooding from stormwater runoff, sea level rise, and storm surge. The Conservation League has raised major concerns about a development planned for the Cainhoys Peninsula, most of which would be located in the floodplain.

