2010 Comprehensive Plan
City of Greer, SC

Section 5: Cultural Resources

The cultural resources element includes features or facilities relating to the cultural aspects of the community. It serves to identify the existing cultural resources of the communities, establish the character and uniqueness of historic areas, and project the cultural needs of the future population. The South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994 provides the following guidelines of the vital characteristics for the Cultural Resources element:

- Historic buildings and structures
- Unique commercial or residential areas
- Unique natural or scenic resources
- Archeological sites
- Educational, religious, entertainment areas or institutions

The cultural resources element of the plan provides a selected overview of the city’s history. It also lists historic and cultural resources including historic properties, historic tourism assets, religious institutions and ongoing cultural activities.

Historical Context

The town of Greer was laid out as a speculative development in 1873 on the newly-opened Seaboard Air Line Railroad. Greer was one of many towns that were founded along the Air Line, which was one of the most significant factors in the industrialization of the Piedmont region of the Carolinas and Georgia. On March 25, 1876, three years after the railroad was built through Manning Greer’s farm, the town of Greer’s was given a charter of incorporation as a town by the state. The town limits were set as a circle of one-half mile radius from the Air Line Railroad Depot. Two years later the town’s boundaries were diminished and truncated to extend one-
fourth of a mile in each direction from the crossing of Mostilla (Main) and Chick Springs (Poinsett) Roads at said place, not to extend beyond the boundary line between Greenville and Spartanburg Counties. This may have been done after it was realized how difficult it was to administer a town in two counties. In 1880, the population within the town limits was 97 people, and by 1890 it had grown to 300. By turn of the 20th century there were 648 people in Greer, 75 of whom were in Spartanburg County because the town expanded its limits to a one-half mile circle. By 1910, Greer had grown to 1,673 people. Figure 5-1 depicts the city’s historical growth of the incorporated limits through 1912. The city’s population continued to add about 600 people every 10 years until 1950’s when, due to annexation of areas to the north and south, including the Victor Mill village, the population jumped to 4,354.
Unique Residential Areas

When unique residential areas come to mind, immediate thoughts turn to the four mill villages in the Greer area. These villages were developed around the cotton mills and were the first examples of tract housing. These communities provided low-cost housing to employees that were within easy walking distance of the mill. These villages were not part of the town proper, but were within the town’s sphere of influence, and economically very important to Greer.

Apalache Mill, pictured at left in 1945, was established on the South Tyger River as early as 1820. Its current form as an industrial village began in either 1888, when it was purchased and the name became Arlington, or 1903, when it was bought by W.B. Smith Whaley and the Whaley group of Columbia and renamed Apalache Mills. The Victor Cotton Mill began operation on the east side of the town in 1896 under the presidency of Greer’s W.W. Burgess, and then was part of the Parker Cotton Mills Company under the direction of Lewis W. Parker, “the master of mill consolidation.” It was later a part of the Victor-Monaghan group. The Franklin Mill was begun in 1900 also by W.W. Burgess. It was demolished and its site is now part of the Greer Commission of Public Works. The Greer Mill opened to the west of town in 1908, and was known thereafter as “the new mill.”

These villages were self-sufficient communities developed with a miniature town center with small-scale stores, churches, and an industry which served as the major employer. Construction styles of these homes are varied by the individual developer. Most mill homes constructed in the Upstate of South Carolina were of clapboard design. These residential areas should be designated as historic districts both at local, state and federal levels. This designation would identify the area as important to the local community and provide education to future generations concerning the importance of maintaining these sites. Local development regulations should be amended to protect these neighborhoods from incompatible land uses that could decrease the value of these properties.

Unique Commercial Areas

Historic Downtown Greer is a highly-concentrated commercial center in the heart of the city and serves as a commercial destination for the area. This area is made up of land uses that are primarily geared to professional offices, retail businesses, and government facilities.
The Historic Downtown also serves as a community focal point. Community events such as the Tunes on Trade free summer concert series, Greer Family Fest, Moonlight Movies, Oktoberfest, Wing Fling, Christmas at Greer Station and the Greer Christmas Parade, in conjunction with cultural programs and activities offered by the Greer Heritage Museum, Greer Cultural Arts Council and other cultural organizations, provide recreational, cultural, and entertainment opportunities which enhance the sense of community for our citizens and reinforce downtowns position as a place where the community comes together.

A harmonious mix of uses that includes second story residential could help to create a larger demand for dining and shopping. Second story residential units in the downtown area would target young professionals and retirees. This demand would create opportunities for entrepreneurs and attract new business to the commercial district. This would also create a demand for increased services offered outside the standard business hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. such as pharmacies, specialty grocers, clothing, and household items. Existing retail merchants and restaurants would be encouraged to expand operating hours as well, helping to create a thriving “24 hour” commercial center.

In order to protect the historic downtown area the city created the Downtown Greer Overlay District to promote compatible development within the Downtown Greer Central Business District, which would complement the character and charm of this unique mixed use center.

**Urban Design**

Urban design is the evaluation of the built environment and the aesthetic value of design in our communities. Basically, urban design looks at the form and function of a local area. Urban design covers subjects from street trees and sidewalks to road design and parking. The way an area looks significantly affects whether or not a tourist will stop to shop or return to the area. The downtown area is in need of an updated urban design plan to provide an effective and efficient commercial center that meets the needs of today’s citizens. The overall goal of the plan should be to develop and implement strategies that would enhance the commercial viability beyond the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

To attract significant large-scale investment in downtown the plan should address ways to: provide a mixture of land uses to attract patrons after 5 p.m.; provide adequate parking through parking garages; perform upgrades and maintenance to existing public facilities such as
buildings, sidewalks, landscaping; expand the official boundaries of the downtown area; provide a pedestrian linkage between the downtown business district and its residential areas; provide adequate signage to downtown along major traffic routes; expand a cultural and historical economic base in the downtown; and, reevaluate the roadway design and parking facilities. To ensure the plan’s success is should include a general timeline for implementation of goals along with innovative ways to fund the recommendations of the plan.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is a recent trend in economic development that is gaining strength throughout South Carolina and the nation. The concept is based on marketing and developing cultural sites that benefit the local economy. Tourist communities along the coast and in mountainous regions have long known the importance that tourism has on a local economy. Historically, Greer’s economy has been grounded in manufacturing; however, our local economy is expanding and becoming more diverse. Diversity in a local economy is beneficial so that if one area of the economy slows, other areas prosper.

In 1993 the Greer Heritage Museum was organized to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials, records, and artifacts that relate to the heritage and history of the area. The museum opened in 1996 on Trade Street in the city's historic downtown. When plans were developing for a new Greer City Hall, the museum board requested, and council approved, the use of the old city hall building for use by the museum. Aided by state grant funding, the old City Hall was completely renovated and the museum officially reopened in its new location in 2009. Staffed by volunteer docents, the museum exhibits artifacts related to the history of Greer and its surrounding area.

The museum offers a library for historical and genealogical research, a classroom theater where short documentaries’ on local history are shown, and interactive displays for children. The museum is a starting point for a walking tour of historic downtown Greer. Highlights include the 1914 Piedmont & Northern Depot, historic buildings with shops and restaurants, the new Greer City Hall, and City Park, which offers picnic and playground areas, a reflecting pond with a gazebo, an amphitheater that regularly hosts free entertainment, and public restrooms.
The city dedicated City Park on July 4, 2009, as a part of its July 4th celebration “Freedom Blast.” The park contains an amphitheater which was designed as an open greenspace area with fountains, several water features, gazebo, sidewalks, and a playground and picnic shelter with plenty of places for citizens to relax, reflect, eat lunch, or read a book. The amphitheater provides the citizens of Greer with a special gathering place to enjoy entertainment or hold special events.

The community is also served by the Greer Cultural Arts Council, which has the mission of providing affordable cultural arts opportunities, through art, music, dance, and drama. The Greer Children’s Theater celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2008 with several theatrical productions, as it presents annually, along with classes and camps to further expand the cultural experience of our citizens. The Arts Council also holds several events in the downtown area such as “Tunes on Trade,” Greer Idol, and a Fall Gallery Walk. The Arts Council is currently seeking a permanent home for its shows and other activities.

Local leaders need to evaluate the future needs of the community to determine what kinds of cultural activities or sites are beneficial to those currently residing here and those programs and facilities that could be used to recruit additional retirees to Greer.

**Religious Sites and Institutions**

As shown in Table 5-1, there are many religious sites in the City of Greer. The majority of these sites are churches. As with many communities churches in Greer have long served as focal points for its residents. Some of the oldest surviving congregations date back to the early 1800’s including Washington Baptist Church founded in 1819, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in 1831, and First Presbyterian in 1841. There are many others with each providing numerous benefits to the community ranging from building homes through the Habitat for Humanity Project, serving food to those less fortunate, and contributing monies to children’s homes and other charitable organizations. Greer and its communities must continue to work with these organizations to make our community a better place to live.

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Archaeological Sites

Greer is located in the center of the dividing line between the Cherokee lands and English settlements making the area an excellent location for finding artifacts such as arrowheads, pottery, and farming tools. However, there have been through the years finds by farmers and other locals of artifacts indicating a presence of people in the area as early as 9,000 to 10,000 years ago. In addition, some finds indicate a presence of more permanent type settlements by non-Europeans up to the 18th century when the lands once belonging to the Cherokee were opened for English settlement. To date, there are more than 57 archaeological sites, four historic structures and two historic areas, as shown in Figure 5-2, throughout the City of Greer.

Figure 5-2
Sites of Archaeological Interests
An in-depth archeological investigation of the Greer area has not been completed.

These sites range from prehistoric times to 50 years ago. To date, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) at the University of South Carolina has been unable to catalog all sites. However, the organization hopes to formulate a comprehensive listing within the next five years through computerized mapping. Greer should work to identify these sites with the help of the SCIAA to identify areas of archaeological significance. Also, the Greer Heritage Museum should maintain a copy of this archaeological survey for those interested in these unique sites.

Goals

The City of Greer’s cultural resources not only contribute to the community’s quality of life but provide substantial economic development opportunities that should be used to its advantage. In partnership with the city community based groups are striving for a renewed vision of arts and cultural activities in Greer that includes current and future facilities, programs, performances, exhibits, and marketing necessary for the cultural vitality of Greer. The following goals and objectives will assist in achieving this vision to promote, preserve and protect of our cultural assets.

Continue to develop and market the historical aspects of the Greer community.
- Preserve and manage the historical district
- Develop a visitors center
- Work with the Greer Heritage Museum
- Attain Certified Local Government status

Continue to develop, organize and host festivals and events in the downtown area.
- Continue to provide events and activities in City Park.
- Continue to support efforts of Greer Station Association
- Implement strategies to develop events and activities in the outlying communities

Re-establish Board of Architectural Review.
- Appoint citizens based on interest, knowledge, and expertise
- Insure all board members receive required training.
Continue to support Greer Heritage Museum.
- Support efforts of the museum board to be open daily
- Support efforts to have the museum serve as a visitor’s center
- Help promote heritage education through the museum

Promote community preservation planning.
- Assist in creating residential historical districts
- Expand the existing commercial historical district