



**TOWN OF ST. GEORGE
SOUTH CAROLINA**

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

March 2021

**Town of St. George, SC
Community Needs Assessment
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This document was prepared by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments based on current planning initiatives and public input on behalf of the Town of St. George.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of the Community Needs Assessment is to identify the community development and housing needs of St. George, particularly the needs of low- and moderate-income persons, and the activities that may be undertaken with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to address those needs. While the Community Needs Assessment provides a summary overview of community development and housing needs in the community, the special needs of low and moderate-income persons in specific neighborhoods of St. George are particularly considered relative to future Community Development Block Grant applications.

II. Outreach

To formulate the assessment of community needs, reliance was placed on existing sources of data, particularly the US Census-, Comprehensive Plan and the Uptown/Little Harlem Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, as well as input from Town staff, residents and community organizations. As required by law, a Community Needs Assessment Public Hearing was advertised in the local newspaper of general circulation, the Dorchester County Eagle Record, and posted on the Town's website. The hearing was held to present the initial CNA draft document, with the intent of soliciting input on the community's needs from Town residents. At this hearing, information was presented concerning the CDBG program, including the amount of funds available, funding guidelines and the range of activities that may be undertaken with CDBG funds. Residents and community organizations were given the opportunity to participate in the process at the Community Needs Assessment Public Hearing held March 16, 2021 and to provide comments at and following the meeting. Comments and suggestions obtained from the public hearing were incorporated into the final community needs assessment document.

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III. Town-wide Demographics – Based on 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Data

1. Population (2019 American Community Survey data)

Total Population	2,352	Elderly > 65	386
African American / Black	1,103	Female Head of Household	318
White	1,204	Hispanic	80
American Indian / Alaskan	0	Islander / Asian	0

2. Housing Data (2019 ACS Data)

Total Housing Units	833		
Occupied Housing Units	744	Vacant Units:	89
Owner Occupied	452	Renter Occupied	292
Median Mortgage Payment	\$1,136	Median Rent Payment	\$593
Owners paying > 30% of HH Income for Housing	12.8%	Renters paying > 30% of HH Income for Housing	73.3%
# Units Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities	5	# Units Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	5

3. Income Data: The following information is gathered from the Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2019 Low Moderate Income Summary Data (LMISD) Local Governments by State, Based on 2019 American Community Survey data base.

Location	#LMI	Total #Persons	%LMI
St. George, SC	1,121	2,352	47.68%

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IV. Community Needs

The following is a summary of the Community Needs related to low and moderate-income families and persons in St. George. The needs identified include both those that might be eligible for CDBG funding and those that the Town would need to fund through other sources.

A. Housing

Residents have stated that there is a serious lack of quality housing and that the Town should prioritize funding in order to fix-up dilapidated houses, for enhanced code enforcement, as well as a need for a variety of affordable housing options in town. Concerns have been also expressed about overgrown lots, squatters, vermin, mosquitoes, stray animals and protection of property values.

Need: Provide opportunities for all residents to live in quality, affordable housing.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Focus improvements of occupied homes on improving roofs, doors, windows and yard clean-up.
2. Support the development of affordable housing and diverse housing types.
3. Support development of affordable housing through the improvement and expansion of infrastructure and facilities.
4. Promote housing developments that provide safe and decent living environments for low to moderate income residents.
5. Take full advantage of affordable housing subsidies including Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and HOME.

Need: Ensure that all current and future residents have the opportunity to live in decent, safe housing.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Ensure all Town residents have access to information regarding their rights to housing opportunities under the Fair Housing laws of SC.
2. Prioritize unsafe, dilapidated, and/or abandoned homes as candidates for condemnation.
3. Reduce slum and blight in residential neighborhoods through demolition of vacant/abandoned buildings and neighborhood cleanups, thus encouraging redevelopment in newly available space.

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B. Infrastructure:

Residents pointed out the need to maintain drainage ditches, particularly the open ditch along Railroad Avenue, as well as throughout LMI neighborhoods and other parts of Town.

Need: Provide adequate stormwater drainage and maintenance in the Town to prevent flooding and associated drainage issues.

Implementation Strategies:

1. The Town should work with the County to routinely unclog drain pipes leading to the Railroad Avenue ditch.
2. Complete an inventory of the drainage system in the Town.
3. Identify ownership responsibilities of the drainage system/pipes located in the Town (area they owned by Town, County, private citizens, etc?).
4. Identify and prioritize areas with inadequate drainage for repairs and upgrades.

Need: Provide safe pedestrian access / sidewalks in neighborhoods, potentially connecting to the middle school.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify and prioritize areas for pedestrian safety and access improvements.
2. Seek funding opportunities for implementation of needed safety and access improvements.

Need: Reliable broadband internet services.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify areas where high-speed internet access is currently unavailable and/or existing service is unreliable in Town.
2. Work with Dorchester County to seek support for expanding and improving internet access to those communities where access is lacking.
3. Coordinate with state and local agencies and broadband providers to develop a plan for providing access to rural areas and seek resources, including CDBG funding, to implement and expand services and/or upgrade existing networks.

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C. Public Safety

It is the mission of the St. George Police Department to safeguard the lives of the community we serve, to reduce the incidence and fear of crime, and to enhance public safety with professionalism, honor and integrity, while at all times, conducting ourselves with the highest ethical standards to maintain public confidence.

Need: The St. George PD will continue to work to improve the quality of life by providing a safe environment for all people within the Town.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Ensure the personal and property safety of the residents of St. George.
2. Increase law enforcement visibility.
3. Increase citizen participation and neighborhood crime watch in the Town to afford residents an opportunity to learn more about law enforcement and the workings of the Department.
4. Maintain a two-way dialogue between citizens and law enforcement to deter crime and make communities safer.

D. Public Health

Citizens have previously commented that the Town is in need of a health facility that is easily accessible to residents. Multiple urgent care centers and one hospital/emergency department are located in the southern end of the county, and citizens in Town and the adjacent rural areas must travel to receive after-hours or emergent care. Reasonable access to quality healthcare at all times of day, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, could certainly benefit the low- to moderate- income residents in St. George and neighboring rural areas who may not have the means to access care after regular business operating hours.

Need: Provide the citizens of the Town of St. George with convenient and timely access to urgent and emergent healthcare options.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify areas in and adjacent to Town where there is limited access to urgent care centers and hospital emergency rooms within a reasonable travel distance.
2. Identify opportunities for public/private partnerships to locate and operate an urgent care medical center or similar in a locality that is easily accessible to low- and moderate-income persons and those citizens living in Town and the nearby rural areas.
3. Seek resources to help facilitate increasing the availability of health services, including testing, diagnostic and other medical services at a fixed location.

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E. Food Access

Residents in multiple rural towns in the upper ends of Dorchester County do not have access to grocery stores in their respective communities. While there is grocery store access in St. George, these stores may not be easily accessible to those residents who lack transportation. Nearby seasonal roadside stands and convenient stores may be the only accessible means of obtaining fresh food and produce within a several mile radius.

Need: Ensure that the citizens of St. George all have access to quality, healthy food, particularly low- to moderate-income persons and/or those without access to transportation.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Work with existing agencies that operate food pantries to provide new or additional services, and/or expand their distribution area.
2. Work to establish a regularly occurring food market/farmers market in any areas that are currently underserved by large grocery retailers who may provide fresh produce at reasonable costs.

F. Economic and Workforce Development

In areas of western Dorchester County, which includes Reevesville, St. George, Harleyville and Ridgeville, approximately 25 percent of the population currently have only a high school diploma. Similarly, Bachelor's degree attainment is low, at approximately 12 percent. Low levels of high-school diploma and Bachelor's degree attainment in rural areas of Dorchester County indicate a high need for linking the rural population to greater education and job training opportunities (BCDCOG Rural Workforce Transportation Study, 2020). Residents have also previously noted that job opportunities and workforce training are needed. As of December 2020, the unemployment rate in Dorchester County is currently 4.3%, which is lower than both the State (4.6%) and National (6.5%) unemployment rates (SC DEW, Dorchester County Community Profile, January 2021). The labor force might not be adequately trained to obtain employment with existing employers in the region for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to a lack of transportation to training and/or employment locations. There is a need to connect the unemployed and underemployed with SC Works programs.

Need: Promote opportunities for labor force training and job creation for LMI persons.

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Implementation Strategies:

1. Promote opportunities to maintain low levels of unemployment and reduce underemployment of the local labor force.
2. Target recruitment and support development of existing industries requiring the occupational skills and education of the existing labor force base.
3. Promote adequate education and training opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed.
4. Promote workforce training, mentorships and apprenticeship programs.
5. Support programs for adult education and job training at all skill levels.

G. Obstacles to Economic Competitiveness

Need: Promote community sustainability by providing new or improved opportunities for economic development and job creation for LMI persons in the County.

Implementation Strategy:

1. Provide necessary infrastructure to support economic or redevelopment, building on community assets and resources.

V. *Priorities and Planned Actions*

A. *Priority Needs*

1. Housing
2. Infrastructure
3. Access to Healthcare

B. *Planned Actions to be taken to meet the Priority Needs:*

1. Conduct housing-related activities that provide a safe and affordable living environment for low- and moderate-income families. The Town has secured a CDBG grant to demolish five (5) dilapidated and/or abandoned homes in the Uptown/Little Harlem neighborhood. A future grant could expand upon these efforts to include housing improvements for low- and moderate-income families through rehabilitation of and basic repairs to homes to ensure they are safe to inhabit, and to improve the overall safety and livability of the area for residents.
2. Continue infrastructure improvements and identify others that will provide increased safety measures and improved drainage. The Town has an active CDBG grant that includes the construction of a safety guardrail and pedestrian barrier along Railroad Avenue between the road and the large ditch that parallels the railroad (from Metts Avenue to Sears Street). This same

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CDBG grant is also funding efforts to improve drainage features in the same area. Completion of an Existing Conditions Survey of the drainage network in town could identify other high priority areas that could benefit from drainage improvement measures. Identify and prioritize areas for pedestrian safety and access improvements, such as sidewalks near the middle school (as has been mentioned by residents). Seek funding opportunities for implementation of the identified needed safety and access improvements.

3. Consider options for the construction and funding of a healthcare facility to serve the Town's residents, particularly those located in the low- to moderate-income areas, including the option to retrofit an existing Town- or County-owned building that could house such a facility. Identify healthcare partners who could staff the facility.

C. Activities for CDBG Funding Consideration and Rationale

The CDBG program is designed to provide assistance to local governments. The overarching goals of the program are to provide decent housing, economic opportunities and a suitable living environment, particularly for persons of low- and moderate-income. CDBG projects generally fall within five (5) programs: Community Infrastructure, Community Enrichment, Neighborhood Revitalization, Special Projects, and Ready-to-go Projects. They must address at least one of the three National Objectives: Benefit LMI persons; aid in the prevention of slum and blight; and/or meet an urgent community need(s) posing a serious threat to the health or welfare of the community. The current CDBG grant addresses slum and blight conditions in the Little Harlem neighborhood and the drainage and safety improvements included in the grant serve a primarily low and -moderate income area. It is anticipated that future phases of any dwelling, drainage and safety improvements in that area will serve to meet the same needs.

Upper portions of Dorchester County are predominately LMI, including areas adjacent to and within St. George, and it is hoped that upgrading the water facilities (underway through an existing USDA grant), as well as broadband access, will increase the chances for expanded economic development activity to serve and support quality of life enhancements for the low- and moderate-income residents. Expanded broadband access will also be a beneficial service to those who find themselves working and schooling from home as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Additionally, the rural areas of Dorchester County, including and surrounding the Town of St. George, have limited to no access to after-hours healthcare. The closest hospital/emergency department/urgent care is located in in the southern end of the County, in the Summerville area. Reasonable access to quality healthcare at all times of day, particularly during the pandemic, could certainly

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benefit the low- to moderate- income residents who may not have the means to access care after regular business operating hours.

The 2020-2021 CDBG Program has been amended to include funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief Economic Security Act (CARES Act). In addition to traditional CDBG-eligible project funding, CDBG-CV funds are available for certain activities that specifically prevent, prepare for and respond to the Coronavirus. Potentially eligible activities include qualifying Community Services and Critically-Needed Public Facility Improvements. Examples include, but are not limited to: funding food pantries and food distribution/delivery for elderly or other primarily LMI residents, increasing the capacity and availability of targeted health services, and equipment and public improvements needed to expand or improve broadband internet access.

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