Horry County is rapidly changing. Our beautiful beaches, warm climate, and low taxes have attracted vacationers and retirees to make Horry County their permanent or seasonal home. In light of the growth that is occurring, Horry County is taking proactive steps to plan for the future. The IMAGINE 2040 Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the principles of sustainable development, focuses on community design and character, maximizes and efficiently expands public infrastructure together with services, and brings people closer to job centers, while encouraging thoughtful development and redevelopment.

Horry County’s population and housing stock have more than doubled over the past 30 years. In 2017, the US Census identified the County as part of the 2nd fastest growing Metropolitan Statistical Area in the nation. By 2040, our year-round population is expected to nearly double again; reaching up to 584,500 permanent residents. If residential growth patterns continue as they have over the last few decades, more than 200,000 of the 275,000 anticipated new residents are likely to make unincorporated Horry County their home.

45% of that growth could be accommodated in unincorporated properties that have already been zoned for major residential developments; however, Horry County and the municipalities within it will need to plan for at least another 63,000 units. Long-term trends reveal that on average 210 new homes are constructed and 650 new residents relocate to Horry County monthly. These numbers were far exceeded in 2017, as more than 4,200 new single family homes were constructed and an estimated 11,800 people moved to Horry County. Increased housing demand and a lack of available supply, compounded by a shortage in construction workers and materials following the Recession, has resulted in higher home sale prices and a shortage of affordable housing. From 2012 to 2018, the average single-family home price jumped from $154,500 to $238,000, exceeding sales prices prior to the economic downturn. The increase in home prices has forced working residents to live further away from their jobs, having an adverse impact on the cost of living and quality of life for our largely tourism based workforce. Conversely, retirees relocating to Horry County are often purchasing more expensive homes closer to the beach. These residents often have a higher expectation of service provided by the County compared to those living in rural areas.

While Horry County will inevitably continue to attract new residents, the lack of diversity in the age of our population, coupled with strained infrastructure and services, presents a challenge to economic growth. Seniors aged 55 and older make up 37% of our population in comparison to 28.9% statewide and 27% nationally. This segment of Horry County’s population is growing more rapidly than other segments. In fact, little-to-no growth is occurring in the 20-29 year old age bracket, and slow growth is occurring for those 30-54 years old. With more than 18% of our residents living below the poverty level, it is evident that Horry County needs to diversify our economy and expand the number of wage earners and entrepreneurs. The County must offer a variety of housing types to attract a diverse range of income earners, age groups, and family types to stay or relocate here. These efforts are necessary to stabilize our economy and our communities, which will have positive secondary impacts on public safety and housing security.
Planning can be a challenging task to undertake in a County of our size with such a wide range of development intensity between urban and rural communities. Existing residents have placed an emphasis on the need for infill development and redevelopment to minimize the cost for additional infrastructure and public services. They have expressed the need for job centers and economic growth. They have also indicated the desire to preserve the landscape and lifestyle of our rural communities. All of these factors, along with public safety, natural hazards, and community health were considered when developing the IMAGINE 2040 Comprehensive Plan and are embodied in the vision of this plan.

In some areas of the County, such as golf course communities, redevelopment may be more challenging, as public safety, stormwater, and separation and buffering of differing uses must be considered in the rezoning and development review process. By allowing for growth to occur in areas where infrastructure and services are already available, it will also reduce the demand for greenfield development in rural areas of the County; thus preserving rural lifestyles, farmland, and important natural resources that help retain floodwaters. Recent floods have revealed the vulnerabilities of our residents, economy, roads, and stormwater infrastructure, but it has also revealed our County’s resilience to adversity.

This plan will allow Horry County to take a proactive role in determining the fate of our communities, economy, roads and infrastructure, services, and quality of life. The IMAGINE 2040 Steering Committee and staff thoroughly reviewed the changing conditions of the County and gathered public input to develop this plan, the heart of which can be defined by the Vision, Future Land Use Map, and the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies. Not only does it address recommended land uses, it exceeds state planning criteria by including an additional chapter on Public Safety. It also provides a foundation for the development of future planning initiatives, such as:

- Comprehensive Road Improvement Plan;
- Stormwater Capital Improvement Plan;
- Parks and Open Space Plan;
- Greenways & Blueways Master Plan;
- Beach Management Plan;
- Historic Preservation Plan;
- updates to the Garden City and Little River area plans; and
- additional neighborhood and area plans.

In order to successfully implement this plan, there will need to be changes to County regulations that will support variation in design, density, and development practices, making quality development more practical. The plan will need to be supported through policy and land use decisions. It will require strategic updates to the zoning ordinance, land development regulations, and rezoning review criteria to ensure that development and infill results in quality design that does not adversely impact existing communities, provides a greater sense of place, expands housing options and affordability, ensure safe and healthy communities, and supports economic growth. Ultimately, this plan provides a roadmap for the future of Horry County, exemplifying the ability of the Independent Republic to define its own destiny and continue to be an attractive place for people to live, work, and play.