GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

SANDFLY:
At the Crossroads

Blueprints for Successful Communities 2004

Georgia CONSERVANCY

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Funding provided by:

The Sapelo Foundation

Courtney Knight Gaines Foundation

BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

SANDFLY:
At the Crossroads

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Blueprints Overview

Blueprints for Successful Communities is an education and technical assistance program of the Georgia Conservancy designed to help communities chart their future in ways that preserve community character and protect valued resources. The program is committed to achieving successful communities by creating sound conservation and growth strategies and building consensus for action.

Georgia is home to abundant natural and cultural resources. Our development patterns over the last 50 years present a very real threat to these resources and to quality of life as a whole. Sprawling, decentralized development, where people must depend on automobiles, is expensive for local governments to serve and has a staggering effect on the environment. Vehicle emissions create toxic air pollution. Stormwater runoff from asphalt poisons rivers and streams. Thousands of acres of farms, woodlands, and open space are lost to wasteful, non-sustainable forms of development.

The Georgia Conservancy partnered with the Urban Land Institute and the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders in 1995 to host its first Blueprints for Successful Communities Symposium. Today the Conservancy maintains an active partnership with fifteen organizations. These diverse organizations and their members provide extensive expertise and understanding of the relationships that exist between land use, public infrastructure, economic growth, and environmental quality.

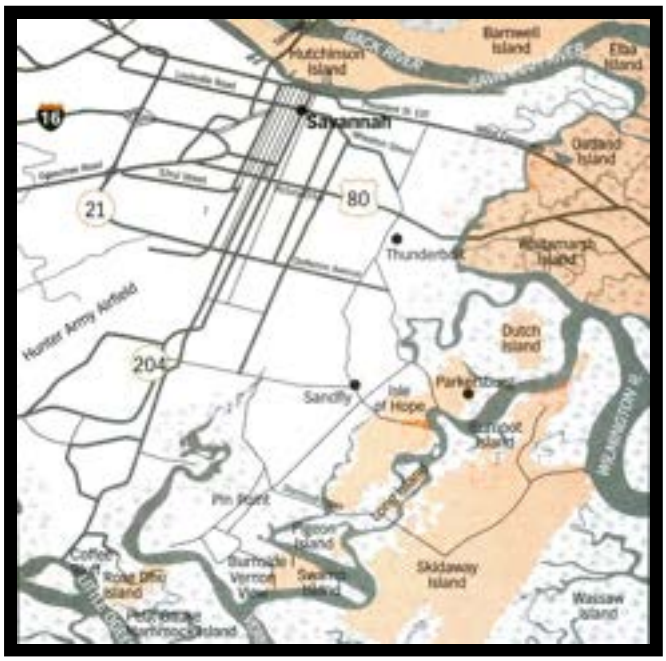
The Blueprints process is modified to fit the varying circumstances in each community. In addition to the Sandfly Community effort, Blueprints has addressed multi-jurisdictional watershed planning, heritage corridor preservation, location of commuter rail stations, inner city neighborhood issues, greyfield redevelopment and other opportunities, all through a collaborative planning process.

Blueprints Principles:

- *Maintain and enhance quality of life for residents of the community*
- *Employ regional strategies for transportation, land use and economic growth*
- *Consider the effect of the built environment on the natural environment as well as history and culture*
- *Employ efficient land uses*

Why Blueprints Sandfly?

Sandfly is a historic African American residential community located in Southeast Chatham County on the outskirts of Savannah, Georgia. The Sandfly community serves as a crossroad linking other important historic sites—including Isle of Hope (Wormsloe Plantation), Skidaway Island (Modena Plantation), Pinpoint (Justice Clarence Thomas' home) and Bethesda Home for Boys—with the main access routes to Savannah.



Source: ***Longstreet Highroad Guide to the Georgia Coast & Okefenokee***

Like many small, historical communities of African Americans, Sandfly is struggling to preserve its heritage and lifestyle in the face of rapidly expanding, over-scaled commercial development. In recent years, commercial intrusions and road widening projects, with their attendant home condemnations and resident displacement, have begun to fragment and erode the edges of this peaceful residential community.

Determined to have a voice in their destiny, Sandfly residents began to mount a campaign to preserve their heritage and keep their community intact. It is important to note that residents realize growth will come to the area, but they desire the type of growth that will enhance rather than degrade the quality of life they have enjoyed and seek to share with future generations. While their success has been limited, community efforts to date are laudable:

- Established the Sandfly Community Betterment Association as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.
- Submitted a successful application to the Georgia Historical Society nominating Sandfly to receive a marker under the Georgia Historical Marker Program. The marker was installed in May 2003.
- Initiated historic surveys and the application process for listing the community on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Worked with surrounding communities to organize Save Our Sandfly (SOS), a diverse, grassroots organization that sought to unite the greater community in an effort to ensure responsible growth and preservation of the history and quality of life in the Sandfly area.
- Joined the Pinpoint and Montgomery communities to form the Sandfly-Pinpoint-Montgomery Neighborhoods Consortium (SPM), a component of Project SAV: Making Connections in Savannah.
- Participated in the Southeast Chatham County Community Plan preparation process and gained a seat for one of the community's long time residents on the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) board.
- Sought and gained rezoning of a significant residential portion of the community to correctly reflect current and desired future land use.

"I moved here when I was 30, after I married a Sandfly girl. This was a fine place to live and raise my kids."

CARSON RAWLS

A former Sandfly resident who comes back every day to see old friends

Carson Rawls, 84, whose Sandfly home was condemned for a parkway exit, lives in Savannah but misses life in Sandfly.

Sandfly struggles to keep identity

Growth fears: As historic black area fights Wal-Mart, it seeks path for future.

Atlanta Journal Constitution

- Attracted local, statewide and national media attention, including coverage by Connect Savannah, Savannah Morning News, Atlanta Journal Constitution, LA Times, New York Times and other print and electronic media outlets.

To build upon these efforts, the Sandfly Community Betterment Association invited the Georgia Conservancy to facilitate discussions and assist the community in addressing key concerns and developing a vision for its future.

This report reflects the outcomes of the community meetings, workshops and student charettes that were a part of the Sandfly Blueprints effort.

Sandfly in Context

History of Sandfly

Many Sandfly residents trace their ancestry to slaves who migrated from nearby Wormsloe and Modena plantations and established homes as free persons at the end of the Civil War. Sandfly is home to several African-American churches and cemeteries, including the Union Baptist Church, which organized during Reconstruction in the 1800s. A more complete documentation of Sandfly's history can be found in the Prospectus submitted to the Georgia Historical Society, entitled, *Sandfly: A Historic African American Community*. The following excerpt from that Prospectus sums up the essence of Sandfly:

> *In addition to the value placed upon spiritual growth, the families who live and worship in Sandfly have instilled the values of hard work, education, and thrift in the children of each succeeding generation. All of the skilled trades involved in construction are represented among descendants of the early settlers, and many of the later generations graduated from college and entered the education field as teachers or principals. Sandfly is a living example of a viable community established by newly freed African Americans who settled on the outskirts of Savannah, Georgia during the post–Civil War era. Their descendants have carried on the traditions and values of their ancestors.*

Photographs: Courtesy of Herbert Kemp

It was these former slaves who gave the community its colorful name. According to Sandfly native Leroy Maxwell, slave boatmen were often at the mercy of pesky gnats in the marshes and "used to sing 'Sandfly Bite Me' when they rowed over here from Skidaway." After the Civil War, the plantations' former slaves received land grants in the area and built their own modest homes and small businesses. Nathan Kemp, the great-great grandfather of current resident Herbert Kemp, was listed as

a slave in an 1850 registrar. Freed after the Civil War, Nathan Kemp settled in Sandfly, and his descendants continue to live in the community.

After 1870, Sandfly's Central Avenue became a principal route for streetcars, which connected Isle of Hope to Savannah during the Reconstruction era. Sandfly served as the suburban hub for the streetcar system, linking Vernonburg, Beaulieu, Montgomery, Isle of Hope, and Thunderbolt to downtown. In the early twentieth century, both Norwood Avenue and the causeway connecting Isle of Hope and Sandfly were lined with palm trees. The landscaping of these roads is evidence of the increasing popularity of Isle of Hope as a tourist destination. The causeway and other Sandfly roads were also used in the 1908 American Grand Prize Automobile Race.

Unlike downtown Savannah and suburban developments like Ardsley Park, Sandfly was not an intensely planned community. The settlement developed without any direct involvement of a professional designer, planner, or engineer. The slave descendents who moved to the area had free reign to organize their environment, such as placing churches at focal points of the landscape. Sandfly has perpetuated itself as a community where African Americans own and shape property. Ownership has been passed down through families for generations, creating a strong sense of loyalty to location.

Religion has instilled a strong sense of commitment in residents to each other and to the preservation of their community.

Over time, extensive subdivision development occurred on Isle of Hope, Dutch Island, and Skidaway Island, the coastal islands just east of Sandfly. Sandfly, however, evolved as a place where slaves' descendents lived a relatively rural life close to the city. In 1934, the Federal Writers Project of the Works Projects Administration visited Sandfly to interview the African-American residents. These writers described the distinct characteristics of the community in *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* as follows:

Sandfly…is a scattered Negro community spreading through the hot pine barrens to Isle of Hope. There is nothing unusual or outstanding about the sleepy little settlement; its three hundred inhabitants appear to lead a placid, uneventful existence. Many of the houses are situated on a side road which leads to Isle of Hope. Modern conveniences are lacking, but the nondescript dwellings are brightened by flower gardens in the front yards, while small truck gardens occupy the space to the rear and sides . . . Usually life in Sandfly flows along pleasantly and without serious interruption. Even in the morning men and women sit around on porches or in yards, sometimes talking, sometimes dozing in the sun. The more industrious are at work in gardens or may been seen through doors busily occupied in washing or ironing clothes. Many of the men are employed as fishermen or day laborers, and the women who work out are generally engaged as house servants in homes at near-by Isle of Hope.

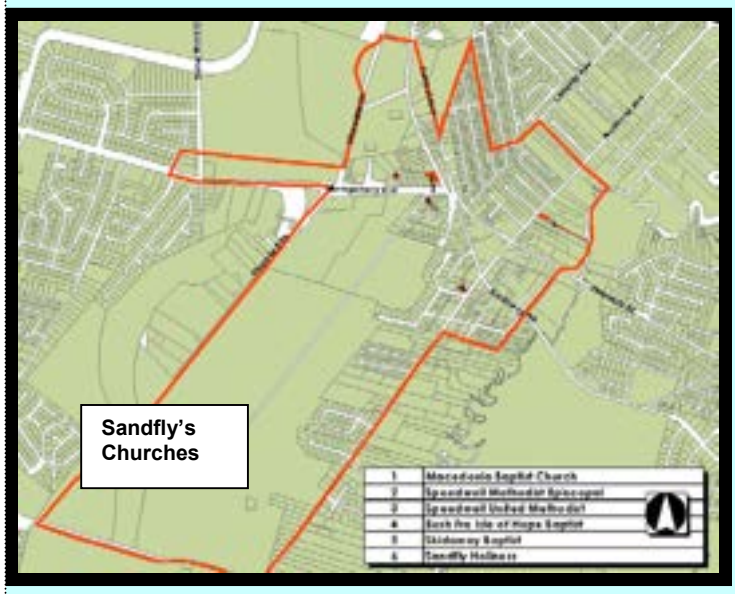
Today, Sandfly possesses a distinctly different feel. Passers-by are less likely to see residents outside their homes. Yards are landscaped with flowers, shrubs, and decorative trees, but lack the "small truck gardens" noted by the Federal Writers Project. Most of the surviving historic houses are situated along Skidaway Road, which has a consistent stream of heavy automobile traffic. Shopping centers, restaurants and modern gas stations dominate the intersection of Skidaway Road, Ferguson Avenue, and Norwood Avenue.

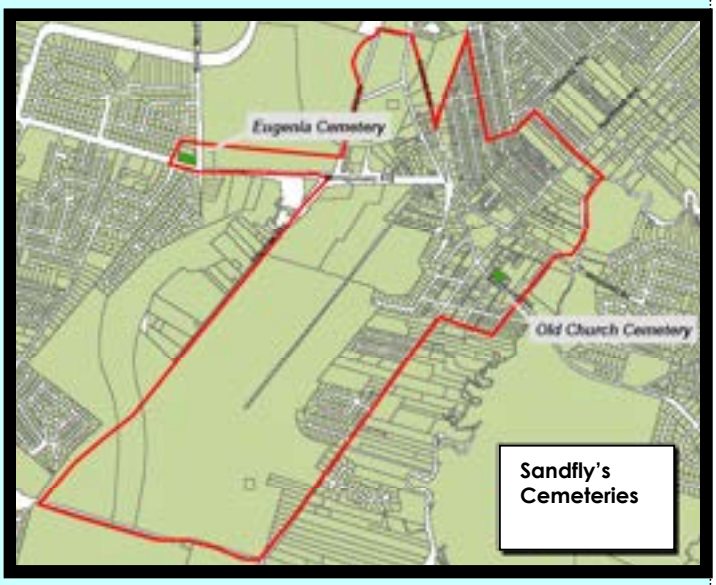
The historic context of this once "sleepy little settlement" has been further interrupted by recent commercial intrusions including a Wal-Mart Supercenter across Montgomery Crossroad from community churches. The placement of an adjacent interchange for the Truman Parkway promises further development and associated impacts in the Sandfly area.

Sandfly's Churches and Cemeteries

The predominance of churches in the community conveys the significance faith has to Sandfly residents. Most of these churches were initially organized during Reconstruction, a time when African Americans throughout the South were creating permanent institutions. Historian William E. Montgomery observed, "Blacks were free now; and they enjoyed options they could only have imagined a short time earlier . . . No longer required to attend racially mixed churches or chapels established by whites, thousands of blacks began organizing their own autonomous congregations." Freed slaves, like those in Sandfly, blended their own traditions of worship with those of missionaries. African Americans in Sandfly established churches that became the focus of identity, culture, and heritage. Most importantly, the church became the central and unifying institution in the black community.

The centrality of religion in Sandfly is evident in the location of its churches. By placing churches at major crossroads, Sandfly residents created a landscape pattern that symbolically expresses the significance of these institutions. Churches are given prominent, highly visible sites in the community. Their placement conveys their importance to Sandfly's African-American residents and to others passing through on their way to the islands and nearby subdivisions.





The most attended church, Speedwell United Methodist, is situated at the intersection of Montgomery Crossroad and Skidaway Road, the geographical heart of Sandfly. Founded and originally built in 1884, Speedwell's sanctuary was rebuilt twice as a result of damaging fires, first in 1934 and again in 1997. Located just across the street on the southwest corner of this intersection is the Southside Worship Center. Macedonia Baptist Church was erected in 1877 just down Montgomery Crossroad from Speedwell. The other major crossroads of Sandfly is the intersection of Norwood Avenue, Ferguson Avenue, and Skidaway Road. Isle of Hope Union Missionary Baptist Church and Union Skidaway Baptist Church are situated along these roadways in close proximity to their intersection.

The community's cemeteries have rich histories as well. Old Church Cemetery on Skidaway Road and Eugenia Cemetery on Montgomery Crossroad serve as burial grounds for these churches. Old Church Cemetery traces its origin to 1863 and is named in honor of a Catholic Church that once stood on the site. Like Old Church Cemetery, Eugenia Cemetery is still an active cemetery for the community. Its headstones date as far back as 1828, and the cemetery was established as a burial ground for slaves and their descendents.

The Sandfly Way of Life

For Sandfly, the church created a way of life. As James Miller, who grew up in Sandfly and still owns property there, says, "[Sandfly] is basically family and I don't mean individual family. I mean community." It is this sense of community that has enabled Sandfly to sustain itself. As Kayne and Keeton discovered, "Money, in particular, was almost always scarce and a source of lifelong worry for many. But sometimes, by coming together, individuals had accomplished collectively what was all but impossible on their own."[1] In Sandfly, when money was tight, neighbors built homes for one another. Sandfly prided itself on raising tradesmen skilled in the building arts. Plasterers, carpenters, and bricklayers worked in surrounding white communities, especially on the nearby islands, for their pay.

When fellow residents needed help building houses, these tradesman banded together. Much of the architectural fabric of Sandfly is the product of this community commitment. Herbert Kemp, a lifelong resident, has carried on this tradition into the present day. An architectural draftsman, Kemp designed five buildings in Sandfly, including the new Speedwell United Methodist Church and houses along Central Avenue.

[1] Kayne and Keeton, *In Those Days: African American Life Near the Savannah River*,1994.

Sandfly at the Crossroads

Sandfly residents have always shown community spirit and have willingly accommodated road improvements, recreational facilities and other public infrastructure improvements that have served the broader community but also chipped away at their own homeplace. In times of adversity, however, faith has given them the courage to fight for their community's preservation. Unfortunately, neither their faith nor their sense of community could prevail in their battle against the large-scale commercial development that now sits on their doorstep.

Sandfly residents continue to monitor land use and zoning activities that threaten the community's heritage and unique character. While they have made short term gains, community residents are under constant pressure to sell out and move away from the area to make way for commercial and other more profitable land uses.

The constant vigilance required to maintain a sense of community points to the urgent need for a long term plan for Sandfly's preservation and political commitment to ensure its implementation.

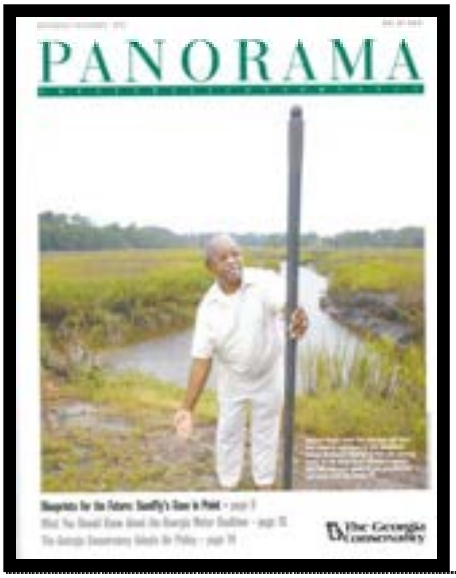
Facing east toward Sandfly from atop the Truman Parkway's Montgomery Crossroad overpass.

Community Meetings

In late summer 2002, the Sandfly Community Betterment Association asked the Georgia Conservancy to facilitate a series of community meetings to help residents think beyond individual development threats and focus instead on longer-range strategies for ensuring sustainable development and maintaining community character and cohesion. At the first meeting, convened in August 2002, the Georgia Conservancy led a discussion in which participants identified community assets, concerns, opportunities and challenges. Over 80 people, including Sandfly and neighboring community residents, county officials and others attended this initial meeting, held at Speedwell United Methodist Church.

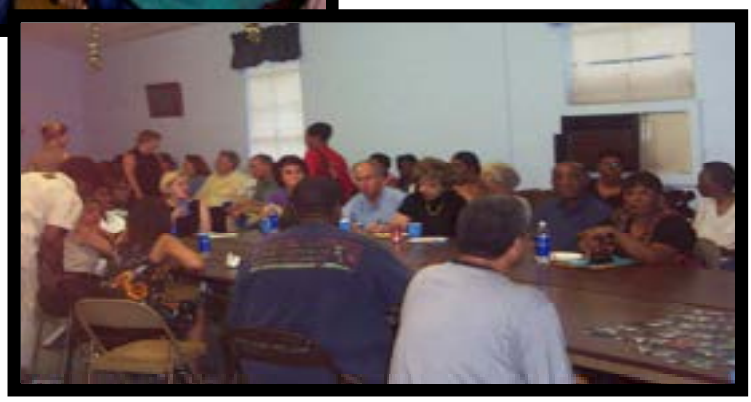
A second community meeting was held in December 2002, at which more than 70 community residents and others came together to articulate a community vision and formulate goals to address the issues identified during the August meeting.

In February 2003, a group of Sandfly Community Betterment Association members and others traveled to Atlanta's Home Park to spend a day learning from another Blueprints community's successes in organizing to address similar issues.



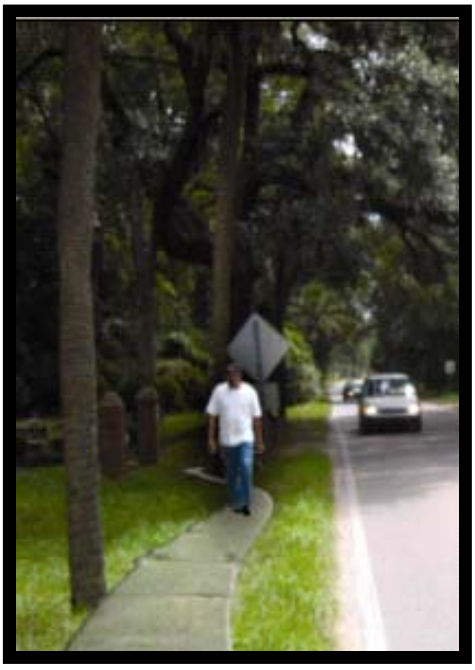
Community Assets

A. Quality of Life	• Small, cohesive community. • Strong multi-generational family ties. • Strong appreciation of history and sense of place. • Wholesome, quaint, peaceful and safe. • Commitment to improving the community. • Able to galvanize in the face of adversity.
B. Physical and Natural Environment	• Unique, rural ambiance. • Built environment reflects the community's rich heritage. • Co-exists with natural coastal surroundings. • Churches, homes and cemeteries tied together with a network of narrow canopy roads. • Many homes have stayed in the same family since inception. • Historic churches are a central element of community life. • Ability to walk to church and needed services. • Beautiful live oak trees, greenspace and wildlife. • Close proximity to the marsh and waterways. • Many nearby recreational opportunities.



Community Challenges and Opportunities

A. Development Pressures and Impacts	• Residents are being displaced. • Character is being lost to road widenings, new road construction and commercial intrusions. • New development is incompatible with residential nature of community and insensitive to current residents. • Development threatens to destroy important natural and historic resources, increase traffic, and create drainage problems.
B. Community Identity and Character	• Residents feel a sense of fragility and loss of community character. • Need to elevate Sandfly's identity and educate others about the community. • Sandfly's character is largely defined by narrow tree-lined streets, and future development should be compatible with and preserve this setting. • Division of Sandfly into several local political districts within the City of Savannah and Chatham County makes fair and consistent representation difficult.
C. Community Facilities and Activities	• Need more indoor and outdoor recreational facilities for children. • Desire meaningful community activities for older residents.
D. Public Services and Safety	• Need sidewalks along streets and paths to connect residents to services and facilities. • Need to improve community safety through the addition of streetlights and crime watch activities. • Police attention is minimal and large, new development will add stress to already lacking fire and police services.



Sandfly Community Vision and Goals

Based on the assets, challenges and opportunities identified in the first Blueprints meeting, Sandfly residents developed a vision for their community's future and outlined goals for realizing that vision:

Sandfly residents envision a future that maintains their community's peaceful, small town, residential character and preserves their family and church oriented heritage, natural surroundings, and unique sense of place.

Residents value the continuity of property ownership their families have enjoyed for generations and want that tradition to continue. They would like protection from rising property taxes and sell-out pressures that could force residents out of their homes and the community.

Residents welcome recreational amenities and limited commercial development, appropriately located and scaled to blend with existing community character and serve neighborhood needs.

The community established goals to address four primary issues:	
A. Development Pressures and Impacts	Goal 1: Protect against fragmentation and displacement due to road construction, commercial intrusions and other development projects.
	Goal 2: Ensure that new development is consistent with the community's vision, compatible with the small town, residential nature of the community and sensitive to current residents.
	Goal 3: Preserve and protect natural and historic resources from negative impacts resulting from new development.
	Goal 4: Protect Sandfly from traffic and drainage problems resulting from new development.
	Goal 5: Preserve and enhance greenspace.
B. Community Identity and Character	Goal 1: Educate the public about Sandfly's history and present-day community.
	Goal 2: Heighten Sandfly's identity through gateway and other enhancements.
	Goal 3: Preserve and enhance narrow tree-lined streets.
	Goal 4: Educate residents about property condemnation for public projects and buy-out pressures.
	Goal 5: Protect residents on fixed incomes from tax increases as property values rise.
	Goal 6: Improve coordination of city and county development and service delivery activities.
C. Community Facilities and Activities	Goal 1: Provide adequate recreational facilities and activities for families and children.
	Goal 2: Provide adequate community activity opportunities for older residents.
D. Public Services and Safety	Goal 1: Provide adequate sidewalks and paths to connect residents to services and facilities.
	Goal 2: Provide adequate street lighting and crime watch activities to ensure residents' safety.
	Goal 3: Increase police and fire protection as development activity increases.

Community Survey and Analysis

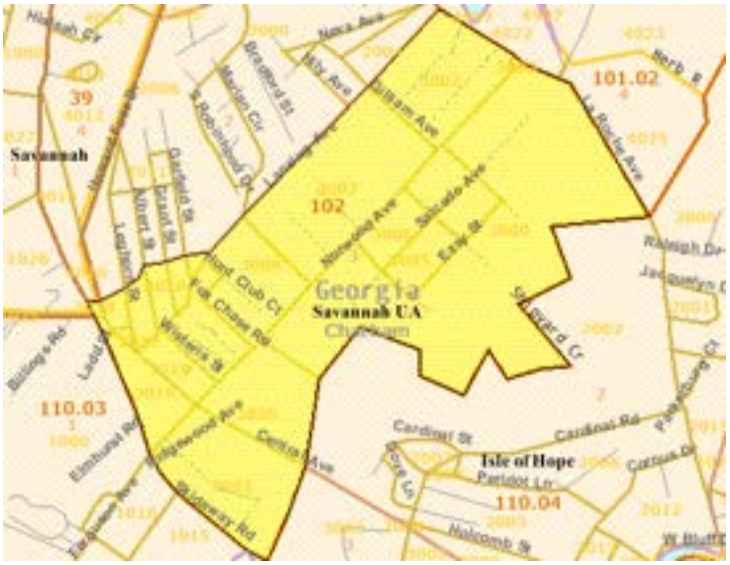
In order to offer suggested solutions to issues raised at the community meetings and stragegies for achieving community goals, Blueprints participants examined current conditions related to demographics, development patterns and community characteristics, and other connected issues. The realities of the larger context area were also considered in developing more specific recommendations for Sandfly.

Census 2000 information was collected and analyzed for the three block groups that pertain to the Sandfly community. Research was also compiled from personal observations, interviews, meetings and conversations with Sandfly residents, and additional information was obtained from the Southeast Chatham County Community Plan.

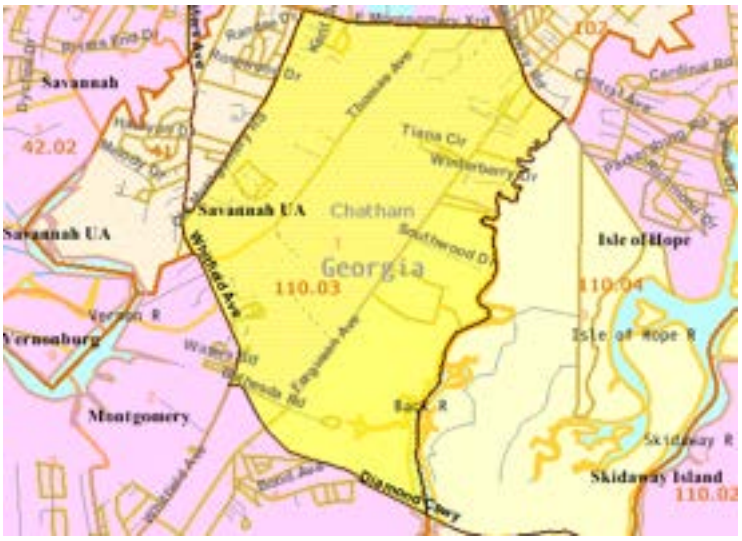
Demographics

Sandfly falls within, but does not wholly comprise, census tract 102-BG2 and BG3, and census tract 110.03-BG1.

Census tract 102-BG2 includes the area between Nottingham Drive to the north, Howard Foss Drive to the northwest, Central Avenue to the west, Billings Road to the south, Lansing Avenue to the southeast, and LaRoche Avenue to the east.



Census tract 102-BG3 includes the area between LaRoche Avenue to the northeast, Lansing Avenue to the northwest, Skidaway Road to the southwest, and Herb River tributary to the southeast.



Census tract 110.03-BG1 includes the area between Skidaway Road to the northeast, Montgomery Crossroad to the north, Montgomery Road to the northwest, Whitfield Avenue to the southwest, Diamond Causeway to the south, and Herb River tributary to the east.

Population

The core of Sandfly is heavily populated by African Americans; the general area, however, is multi-racial, and homes and businesses in the area are owned by a variety of races. The following tables show the ethnic, sex and age breakdown of the three-block group area.

Income

According to Census 2000, residents in these block groups, on average, earn more per household than the neighboring community of Bacon Park. Interviews and meetings with Sandfly residents revealed that most of the African-American residents of Sandfly are employed as painters, plumbers, masons, tile setters, educators, technicians and small business owners/workers.

Housing

Housing data for three-block group area show strong home ownership (81.2%) and high housing occupancy (94.9%) rates, both of which are good indicators of longevity of home ownership in the Sandfly community.

Property Values

As the map of assessed property values shows, the value assigned to most Sandfly residents' homes is well below that of surrounding properties, illustrating the longevity of property ownership and explaining the pressure some residents are experiencing to sell out and make way for more profitable development.

Ethnicity	102-BG2	102-BG3	110.03-BG1	Total*	% of Total*
Total	1,624	1,512	2,027	5,163	
White	385	1,047	1,069	3,041	59%
Black	1,193	432	356	1,981	39%
Am Indian	6	1	3	10	0.2%
Asian	19	21	35	75	1.4%
Other	7	4	9	20	0.4%

***These figures may not count individuals who reported more than one race in combination and, therefore, may not add to the total population or 100%.**
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

Sex by Age	102-BG2	102-BG3	110.03-BG1	TOTAL	% of Total
Total	1,624	1,512	2,027	5,163	
Male	772	696	1005	2,473	47.8%
Under 18	275	195	294	764	14.7%
65+	17	61	112	190	3.6%
Female	852	816	1022	2,690	52.1%
Under 18	288	198	242	728	14.1%
65+	44	114	136	294	5.7%

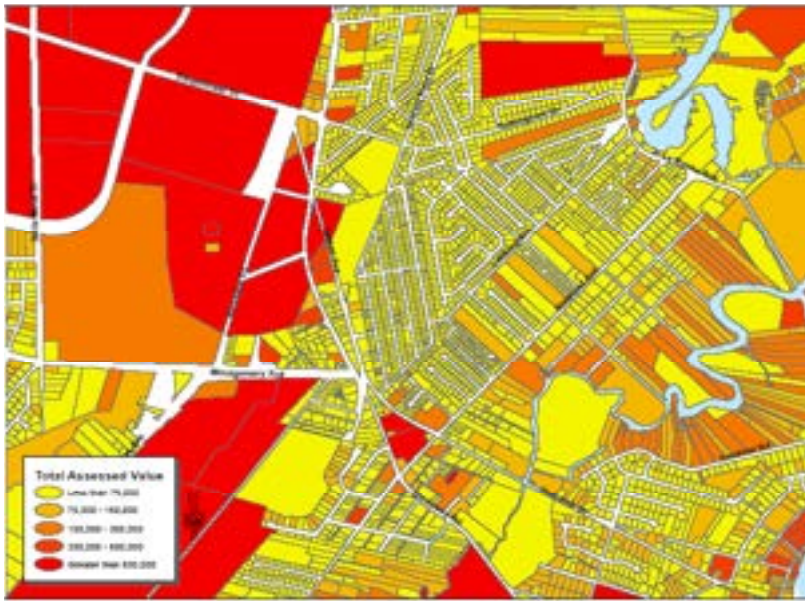
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

	102-BG2	102-BG3	110.03-BG1	TOTAL	%
# of Occupied Housing Units	535	553	742	1830	
Owner-occupied	438	424	624	1486	81.2
Renter-occupied	97	129	118	344	18.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

	102-BG2	102-BG3	110.03-BG1	TOTAL	%
Housing Occupancy Status	558	588	782	1928	
Occupied	535	553	742	1830	94.9
Vacant	23	35	40	98	.05

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000



Total Assessed Property Values: Sandfly Community

Development Patterns and Community Characteristics

Sandfly centers on Montgomery Crossroad, Skidaway Road, Central Avenue, Ferguson Avenue and Norwood Avenue, although its peripheral borders are not as easily defined. Located as an important crossroad for many outlying communities, Central Avenue became the main route for the Street Car system in the late 19th century, which linked satellite communities to the city of Savannah.[2] Today, Sandfly still serves as a crossroad linking Skidaway Island and other Southeast Chatham County communities with downtown Savannah. This role may lessen with the extension of the Truman Parkway to these areas.

Sandfly has developed organically over time, following to some extent the old street-car lines. For the most part, structures were built when and where they were needed, parks were placed where there was room, and stores developed from people's homes. The land was owned by families, and over time the families sold and granted pieces of land to others. Nevertheless, the core of Sandfly reflects a traditional village pattern, with appropriately scaled commercial development at the major intersection and homes clustered nearby.

Rural Fabric

With the exception of the commercial district and some new residential subdivisions, much of Sandfly is sparsely developed and characterized by centuries old live oak trees and canopy roads, some still unpaved, with original dwellings dispersed throughout. A simple journey through the area reveals an abundance of overhead power lines, lack of sidewalks and, for the most part, a lack of street lights. During a conversation with a local resident, it was mentioned that Sandfly was promised underground power lines as well as sidewalks, pending a certain increase in owner residency. (As stated under Housing, above, Census data for the area shows a high percentage of both home ownership and housing occupancy.) Sewers were not brought into the area until the 1980s.

Transportation and Traffic

Sandfly's central location has led to the expansion of several of its once sleepy, shady streets—Montgomery Crossroad, Skidaway Road, and Ferguson Road/Norwood Avenue—into major arterial roads. With that evolution has come traffic congestion and the growth of commercial activities at major intersections and along Montgomery Crossroad. The area's arterial network is well suited for public transportation, and the Chatham Area Transit Authority provides public bus service throughout the area. Most commuters traveling through Sandfly, however, seem to favor automobile use.

A major area of concern regarding vehicular traffic is the intersection of Montgomery Crossroad and Skidaway Road. Montgomery Crossroad is a five-lane road that channels motorists into the heart of Sandfly. The widening of Montgomery Crossroad from two lanes to its current configuration resulted in the displacement of Sandfly family gravesites. Skidaway Road is also slated to be widened from Montgomery Crossroad to Norwood Avenue—a high pedestrian use area that includes a number of historically significant structures.

The most significant road serving the general area is the Truman Parkway, which is designed to connect downtown and midtown Savannah with outlying

[2] D'Alonzo, *Streetcars of* Chatham *County*, (1999).

areas to the south and southeast. Sandfly lies directly in the path of the parkway, which has physically divided the community and displaced a number of long time residents. Moreover, the placement of full interchanges at Montgomery Crossroad and the widening of a parallel neighborhood street, Varnadoe Drive, has created the expectation that commercial real estate development is not only appropriate for the area, but is also inevitable.

As the Truman Parkway is extended to Whitfield Avenue and beyond, commuter traffic coming through the heart of Sandfly is likely to diminish—possibly precluding the need to widen Skidaway Road in this area.

Residential Characteristics

Sandfly's residential areas are interspersed throughout the community. The original dwellings give the area a rural quality, while some newer residential subdivisions introduce the more contemporary styles in a typical suburban layout.

The typical Sandfly house is of a vernacular style developed over time. Many of these homes are located close to the street, and are one to two stories in height. Typically, porches are located in the front of the structure with stairs leading into the front yard or to the driveway.

Many of the homes have paths leading between and behind them. These paths are used most frequently by local residents as short cuts to each others' homes and their churches. Unless told by a resident, one might never know that these paths exist.

A number of the homes and structures in Sandfly are old enough to be considered for the National Register of Historic Places (see Historic Resources, below), although additions that have been made to many detract from their historic integrity. Part of the charm of Sandfly, however, is that residents respect the fact that these homes and churches have been around for a long time and have chosen to add to, rather than destroy and replace them.

Commercial Characteristics

Sandfly's commercial center reflects both the past and the present with traditionally built and locally owned small shops, several restaurants, and a few chain establishments such as Piggly Wiggly, Shell and Amoco.

Many of the existing commercial buildings are relatively new to the area. As the need for modernization has occurred, so has the type and size of commercial structures. There is not a uniform look to existing commercial buildings, although most were built during the same period. Many are mass produced building types and would look the same regardless of location. A few of these structures have been updated recently, but still fail to respond to Sandfly's vernacular style.

Natural Environment

While much of the area surrounding Sandfly is characterized by vast saltwater marshes, tidal creeks and a general dominance of natural environment over the built environment, Sandfly has lost much of its greenspace—particularly canopy trees along the main routes—to road widenings and development. Nevertheless, portions of the community still enjoy a rich mix of natural vegetation, centuries old live oaks and stretches of canopy roads.

Historic Resources

Although much of the historic fabric of Sandfly is physically gone or has been altered, the Luten Hill district and other miscellaneous structures have been evaluated as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Sandlfy Community Betterment Association has begun the application process for National Register listing of those and other historic resources within the community.

As part of that process, and to assist with background information for the Sandfly Blueprints effort, Savannah College of Art and Design historic preservation students surveyed and photographed Luten Hill district and other structures and completed the National Register survey forms for those structures.

As shown on the map at right, the Luten Hill district includes eight residences historically associated with the African-American Luten family, prominent residents of Sandfly since the post Civil War era. The Luten Hill district is significant as an example of local craftsmanship in an African-American community, as well as for the multi-generational ownership of land and houses by the Luten family.

Eight resources in the Sandfly community have been deemed eligible for individual listing on the National Register, including five houses, one commercial building, one church and one cemetery. Several additional resources provide historical context and are significant in their own right, including Central Avenue, which follows the historic streetcar line, Norwood Avenue, lined with palm landscaping dating to the early 20th century, and Skidaway Road Causeway, between Sandfly and Isle of Hope, also planted with palm trees in the 1920s. These resources are significant for their association with Sandfly's historic African-American community, local building traditions and religious heritage. About 20 other resources have been deemed as meriting further research.

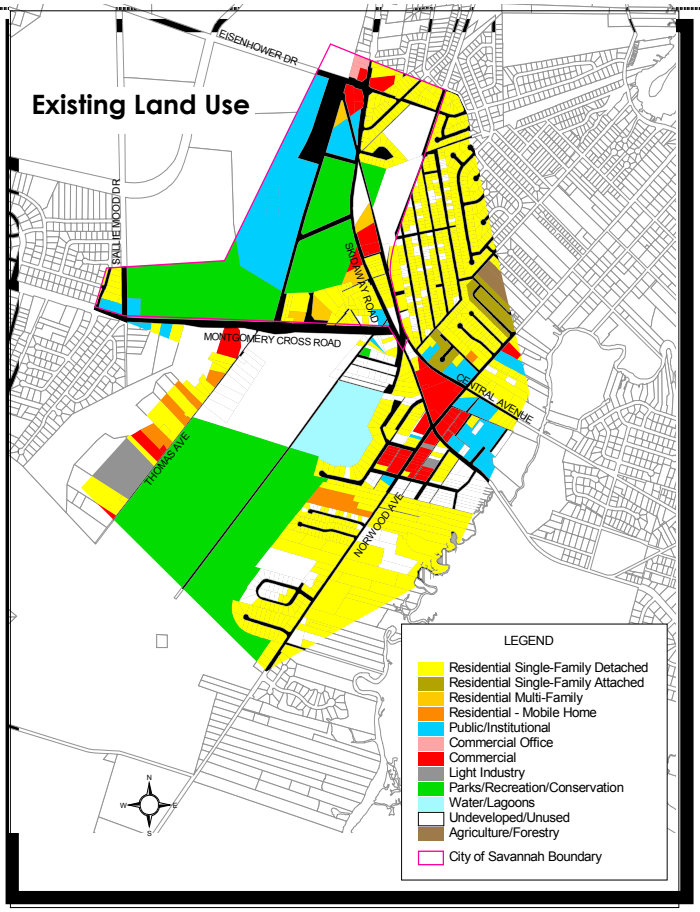
Larger Context Area: Southeast Chatham County Community Plan

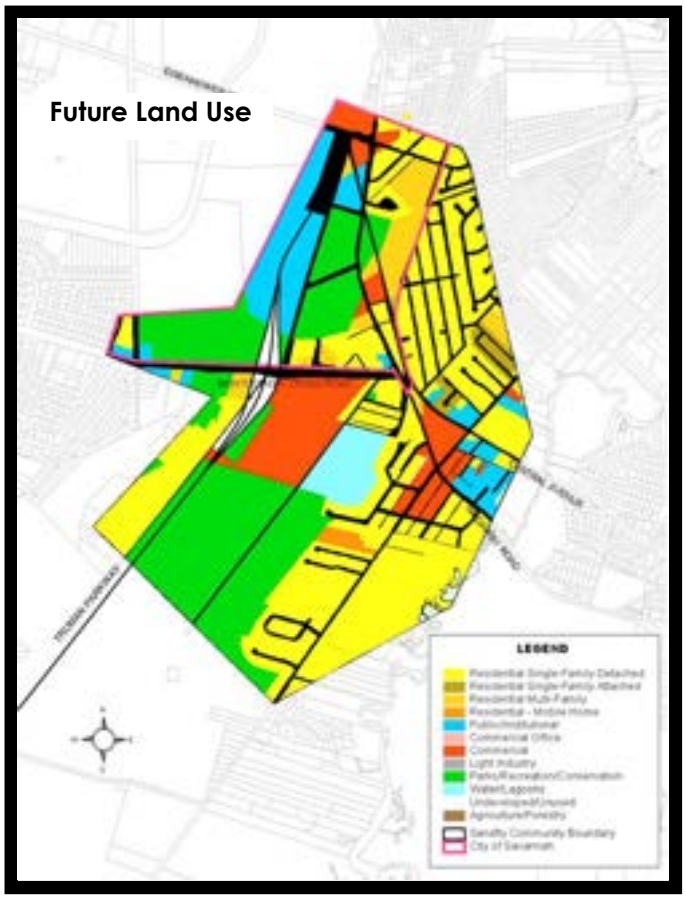
The Southeast Chatham County Community Plan, adopted in April, 2003, and accompanying zoning amendments cover the portion of Sandfly that lies within Chatham County. Several Sandfly residents participated in the plan development process, both on the citizens advisory committee and in public meetings. In addition, the Assets, Challenges, Vision and Goals expressed by the Sandfly Blueprints participants were incorporated into the plan by reference. The overall vision and goals adopted in the Southeast Chatham Community Plan are congruent with much of the Sandfly Blueprints vision and goals

The existing and future land use maps created for the Sandlfy area and adopted as part of the Southeast Chatham plan appear at right. It is important to note that the portion of Sandfly lying within the City of Savannah—and where a significant number of Sandfly residents live—was not included in the Southeast Chatham plan (and is not covered on these maps). Some of this area was recently rezoned at the request of Sandfly residents to more accurately reflect the residential nature of the area and to protect it from commercial intrusion. It is unknown at this time when the City will update its plan for this portion of Sandfly.

Town Center Overlay

The Southeast Chatham Plan and accompanying zoning amendments also include provisions for a Town Center Overlay District for Sandfly. The purpose of the overlay is to create or enhance the identity and attractiveness of the community while expanding its access to goods and services. Other benefits include minimizing traffic impacts of new commercial development and creating a more pedestrian and bicycle friendly environment. The town center design guidelines are meant to encourage a better mix of uses and more attractive design that relates to the surrounding community and natural environment.





Community Design Workshops

A central component of the Blueprints process is the community design workshop, which allows workshops participants to discuss pertinent issues in the area of concern, as well as possible solutions and strategies.

To assist with this effort, the Georgia Conservancy arranged for the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) to conduct an urban design studio focused on Sandfly during the fall 2003 quarter. Using the vision and goals established by the community and information obtained from the community inventory and analysis, graduate students enrolled in the studio created five master plan concepts for the Sandfly area.

The students met with Sandfly residents and business owners and the Steering Committee on several occasions during the quarter and conducted field surveys of the community and surrounding developments. In October 2003, Georgia Conservancy staff facilitated a community meeting at which the students presented their preliminary master plan concepts to gain community input and feedback. The students' concepts were also reviewed by the Steering Committee and several Sandfly area business owners. In November 2003, the students presented their final concepts and recommendations at a community meeting held at the Metropolitan Planning Commission.

During 2004, the Sandfly Community Betterment Association hosted several additional Blueprints meetings to refine the students' ideas and incorporate them along with other community planning goals into a plan of action for promoting responsible growth, protecting Sandfly's heritage and preserving its future.

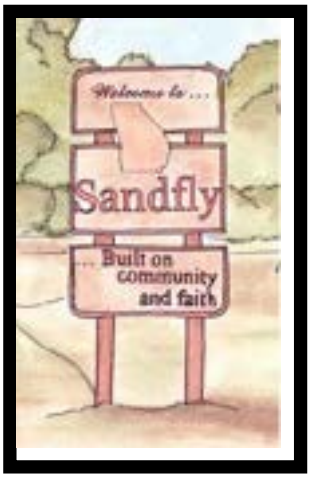
An outline of the students' design concepts is presented below within the context of corresponding community goals (although many of the concepts serve more than one goal).

Design Concepts

Goal: Heighten Sandfly's identity and preserve community character.

Of primary concern to the workshop participants was the preservation and enhancement of Sandfly's identity and character of as a historically significant and family-based community set within rich natural surroundings. These recommendations respond to Ideas presented by participants including education of the general public regarding historical and present aspects of the community, identification of the community with gateways and landmarks, and preservation and enhancement of the community's narrow tree-lined streets.

Gateways



Install at points of entry to Sandfly, including:

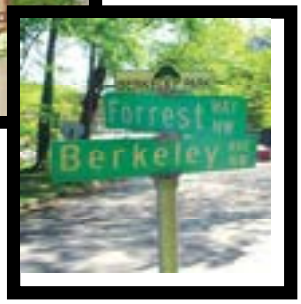
- Montgomery Crossroad at Skidaway Road
- Skidaway Road at Central Avenue
- On Ferguson Avenue between Gun Club Road and Skidaway Road

Highlight through signs, plantings, etc.

- Name of community (Historic Sandfly)
- Tag Line (e.g., "Built on Community and Faith")

Identify and enhance Sandfly's historical center (SW corner of Skidaway/Montgomery Crossroad)

Install signs at other significant sites, such as parks and cemeteries



Install local street signs (signifying "Historic Sandfly") above standard street signs

Medians

Plant a canopy tree island along approach to Montgomery Crossroad/Skidaway Road intersection to:

- Calm traffic
- Announce entry to a different space
- Soften appearance of roadways
- Serve as a site for public art

Goal: Enhance community facilities and recreational opportunities.

These recommendations respond to residents' desire for additional community facilities, including a community center, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities for children and youth, and activity opportunities for older residents. Some also respond to the goal of heightening Sandfly's identity and preserving community character.

Cultural/Community Center

Identify possible locations, such as:

- Skidaway and Montgomery Crossroad
- Adjacent to Wal-Mart site
- "Campground" on Central Avenue

Include activities for children and seniors

Museum

- Feature founding families, churches, local artwork, connections with neighboring areas (Wormsloe, Bethesda, Isle of Hope)
- Investigate installing a Sandfly exhibit at existing Wormsloe museum
- Conduct walking/trolley tours (low priority)

Library

- Incorporate into a community center or locate adjacent to Wal-mart or other shopping center

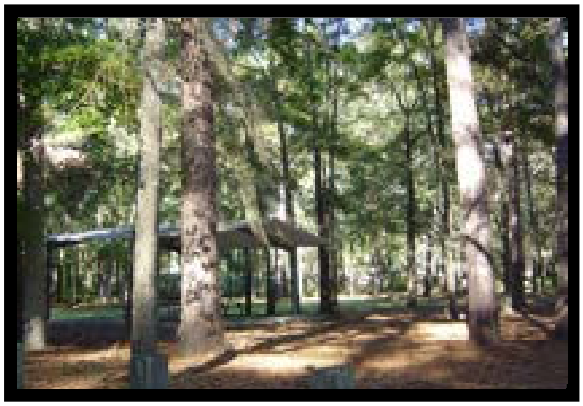
Visitor information center or kiosk

- Place to complement historical marker across from Speedwell Church

Greenspace and Parks

Create a community park at existing "Campground" on Central Avenue:

- Combine Cultural Center/museum with other park functions at Campground area
- Picnic Areas
- Basketball/Tennis Courts
- Walking/Biking Paths



- Play Area
- Outdoor pavilion
- Simple indoor recreational facilities

Enhance and possibly create a community park in the Historic Marker area across from Speedwell Church to provide a centrally located outdoor meeting area for the community.

- Plant shade trees along borders abutting streets and homes
- Landscape to allow for sitting areas facing away from street traffic to internalize the park's use, keeping it user-friendly.

Identify available land in residential neighborhoods (e.g., Billings Road) available for purchase or possible donation

Incorporate greenspace within existing commercial areas, such as Piggly Wiggly parking lot

Goal: Enhance community livability and safety.

The design concepts presented below attempt to establish a healthy model for growth while preserving and enhancing what exists. Many of the recommendations are rooted in transportation since Sandfly's development is in large part based on the original streetcar experience of moving along a progressive path. Whether pedestrian or vehicular, transportation needs to respond and be sympathetic to the rural, community-oriented flavor of the neighborhood. At the same time, since Sandfly has historically been a crossroads and a link to other communities, the community must meet the demands of the inevitable through-traffic.

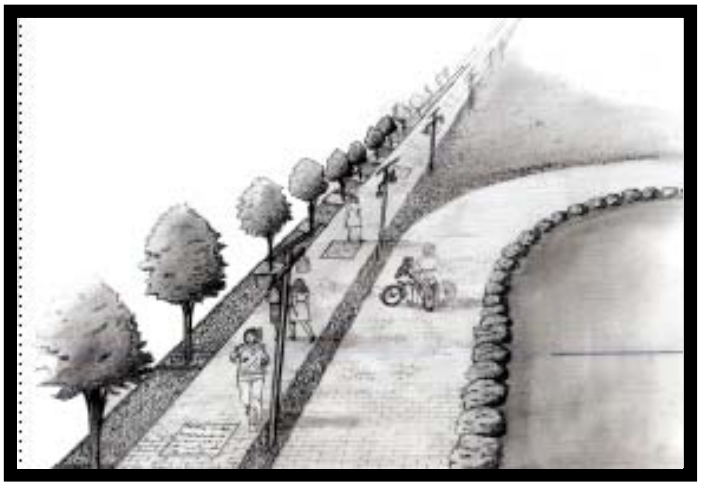
Sidewalks and Crosswalks

Install sidewalks along major roadways and in commercial districts to slow traffic and provide pedestrian access:

- Route to avoid tree damage and preserve greenspace
- Install plaques with community facts and historic references
- Consider brick sidewalks in commercial district
- Would need to acquire land from some front yards for sidewalks

Install secondary sidewalks or organic paths to connect residential areas to main sidewalks

Install crosswalks at all intersections, preferably made of contrasting material or surfacing (e.g., brick); install pedestrian crossing signals at all intersections with traffic lights.



Lighting

Install lighting on streets and pathways throughout the community

Install "safety lighting" in public places

Replace harsh existing lighting with "vernacular" lighting (e.g., lampposts along the more traditional sidewalks, and low foot-high lighting along pathways.

Target lights toward the ground to reduce glare and intrusive night lighting

Possibly use building wash lighting and other visual highlights to avoid excessive lighting

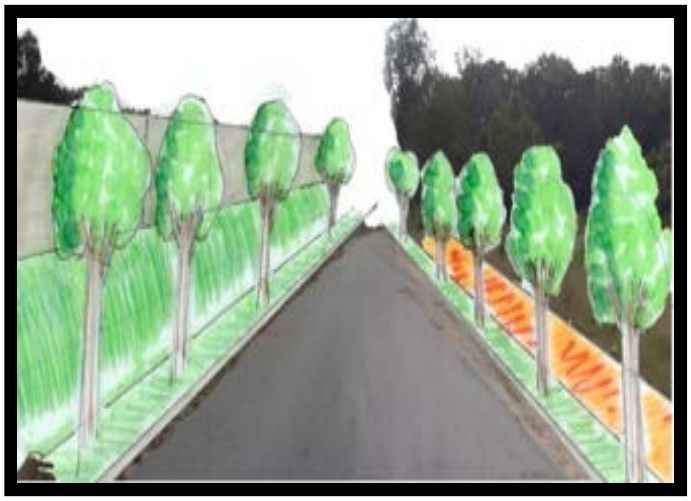
Paths

Install a pedestrian and bicycle bridge to reconnect the old Central Avenue Streetcar line to Isle of Hope.

Install pedestrian and bicycle paths adjacent to road-ways and in parks and other greenspace to serve as connectors to commercial centers, recreation and natural areas, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Identify and improve existing pathways

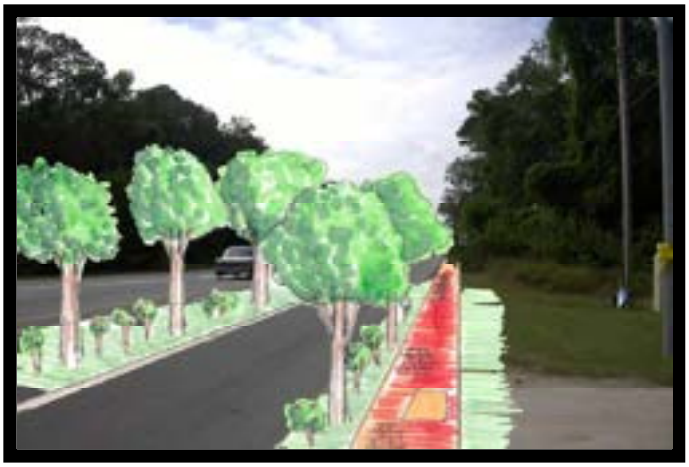
Use meandering design, with natural materials such as oyster shells.



Roadway Enhancements

Install sound barriers to block Truman Parkway noise

Replace tree canopy along Montgomery Crossroad, Skidaway Road, and Norwood/Ferguson Avenue to control speed and recreate residential feel.



Eliminate the center turn lane on Montgomery Crossroad as it enters Sandfly and insert a median or tree islands planted with canopy trees; also plant canopy trees to line both sides of Montgomery Crossroad along the length of the median.

Plant shade trees in the median and sidewalk buffer zone to create a pleasant tunnel of vegetation making it more pedestrian friendly and helping to slow traffic.

Changing roadway material asphalt to brick at intersections to slow traffic and to provide a harmonious merger between the sidewalk and street that it crosses.

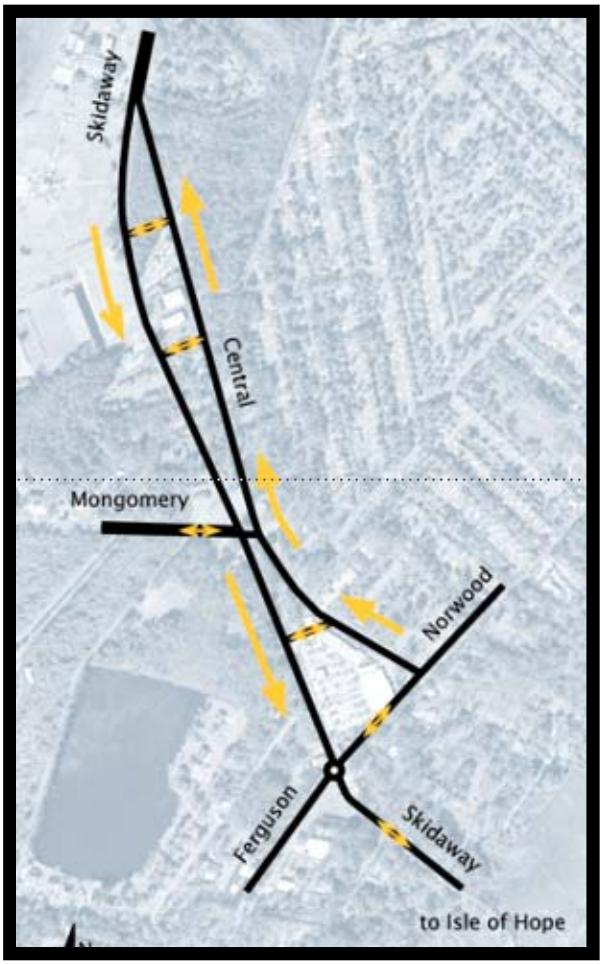
Place utility lines underground.

Commercial Center
(Skidaway Road and Ferguson Avenue)

Create pedestrian and gathering areas in Piggly Wiggly shopping center

Encourage redevelopment at street edge along Skidaway Road to slow traffic and increase access for pedestrians; edge with sidewalks and access to stores from both the street and existing parking lot.

Plant canopy trees along the street edges and additional trees in the parking lot for shade.



One Way Pairs
The widening of Skidaway Road as it enters Sandfly could be prevented by re-routing traffic onto one-way streets. Skidaway Road would become the one-way southbound from Allen Paulson Park to Ferguson Avenue and Central Avenue would become the one-way northbound from Norwood Avenue to Allen E. Paulson Park. Two additional streets would be added linking the northbound and southbound streets. As a way to slow down traffic and encourage drivers to be more aware of their surroundings, stop signs would be placed at connecting intersections that have no traffic lights.

Summary of Goals and Strategic Actions

The primary concern that surfaced during the Sandfly Blueprints workshops was maintaining the community's peaceful, residential character and preserving its family- and church-oriented heritage, natural surroundings, and unique sense of place. To address that concern and its associated challenges and opportunities, Sandfly Blueprints participants established the following goals and priority strategies:

Development Pressures and Impacts

Goals Summary: Ensure that all new development and redevelopment within and adjacent to the community is compatible with Sandfly's residential nature; is sensitive to and protects the rights of current residents; preserves significant and sensitive resources; and that development impacts are mitigated.

Priority Strategies:

1. Seek inclusion of the recommendations included in this report in the Southeast Chatham County Community Plan and City of Savannah comprehensive or sub-area plan(s).

2. Seek assistance from the City, County and Metropolitan Planning Commission to develop a specific Sandfly community plan covering both the unincorporated and incorporated areas of Sandfly and including:

    - Detailed land use, zoning and historic district overlay recommendations consistent with community goals and targeted to preserving community character;

    - Recommendations for traffic, transportation, parks, community facilities, and infrastructure improvements consistent with community goals and oriented to community needs;

    - Recommendations for greenspace and canopy tree protection and preservation;

    - Design guidelines for street and sidewalk improvements and commercial activities consistent with community goals;

    - Recommendations for coordinating or unifying City of Savannah and Chatham County planning, development and service delivery activities within the Sandfly community.

3. Continue application process for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

4. Strengthen partnerships with adjacent neighborhoods in addition to Pinpoint and Montgomery, such as Mayfair, Bacon Park, Nottingham, and Isle of Hope in order to create a stronger voice in decision processes.

Community Identity and Character

Goals Summary: Preserve and enhance Sandfly's character and identity as a historically significant and family-based community set within rich natural surroundings.

Priority Strategies:

5. Seek assistance from the Institute for Community Economics (http://www.iceclt.org) or Department of Housing and Urban Development to investigate establishing a community land trust (CLT). (A CLT is a private non-profit corporation created to acquire and hold land for the benefit of a community and provide secure affordable access to land and housing for community residents.)

6. Develop a plan for implementing recommended design and other community improvements outlined on pages 16-19. The plan should outline priorities, assess feasibility and costs, set timelines and identify potential funding sources.

7. Form partnerships with area businesses to establish common goals and gain support for community design projects, such as gateway enhancements and local street signs.

8. Pursue public and private funding for gateways, signage, median plantings, lighting and other community improvements recommended in this report. Possible sources include area businesses, local foundations (e.g. Wormsloe Foundation), and government grants such as Department of Community Affairs Quality Growth grant program.

9. Seek assistance and funding to develop a campaign to educate the public about Sandfly's history and present-day community. Possible sources of assistance include the Georgia Historical Society, University of Georgia Press, the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network, Wormsloe Historic Site, and the African American Heritage Preservation Foundation.

10. Seek assistance through S-P-M, community-based non-profit organizations, and government sources to educate residents about property condemnation for public projects and buy-out pressures from realtors and private developers.

Community Facilities and Activities/
Public Services and Safety

Goals Summary: Enhance community facilities, recreational opportunities, safety and livability for *existing* residents and businesses as development fills in around them.

Priority Strategies:

11. Seek assistance from city and county representatives to explore the feasibility of unifying Sandfly under one jurisdiction or, alternatively, better coordinating City of Savannah and Chatham County planning, development and service delivery activities affecting the Sandfly community.

    See also Strategies 2 and 6, above.

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Special Acknowledgements

All of the residents of Sandfly
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John McMasters, *Chatham County Commission*
Jeff Rayno, *Chatham County Commission*
Helen Stone, *Chatham County-Savannah MPC*
Chica Arndt, *Wormsloe Historic Site*
Gwen McKee, *Isle of Hope resident*
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Karen Robertson, *PR Concepts*
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Home Park, Atlanta Residents
Speedwell United Methodist Church

GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S

BLUEPRINTS

FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

Blueprints Principles

- Maintain and enhance quality of life for residents of the community
- Employ regional strategies for transportation, land use, and economic growth
- Consider the effect of the built environment on the natural environment as well as history and culture
- Employ efficient land uses

Georgia
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