Waterfronts in South Carolina have changed. Explosive population growth along the coast over the last century has spurred pressure changes on these places. Changes in who lives on the coast have meant changes to who is using the waterfronts.

Compared to other states, South Carolina is early in the process of waterfront revitalization. In order to sustain a network of resilient and prosperous working waterfronts in South Carolina, it is first important to understand the existing conditions; in order to set a course for the future it is first important to know the direction in which to head.

Steps in this process include determining:
- How working waterfronts are currently viewed and valued?
- The vision that working waterfront communities have for their future?
- How working waterfront communities may evolve in a healthy and resilient manner?

S.C. Sea Grant Consortium and Clemson University engaged working waterfront stakeholders in a dialogue to answer these questions.

From July through October 2015, a series of workshops was held in working waterfront communities that are critical to meeting the needs of the commercial fishery. The communities included: Georgetown, McClellanville, Murrells Inlet, Port Royal and Shem Creek. In each community stakeholders discussed their unique working waterfronts. The participants varied by community, but included: commercial fishermen and shellfish farmers, municipal officials (elected and other), tourism professionals, S.C. Department of Natural Resources representatives, restaurateurs, retail seafood business owners, non-profit & industry representatives.
Defining the Working Waterfront

Traditionally, working waterfronts have been defined as places for docking of the commercial fishery fleet where they could access infrastructure for processing, packing and transporting their product, as well as for maintenance of their vessels and equipment. Stakeholders in each of the five communities included elements of the traditional working waterfront in their definition, but they also added others. Definitions of working waterfronts proposed in each community included both physical and the functional components.

Identifying Community Priorities

Stakeholders in each community meeting were asked to identify opportunities to make their working waterfront viable. Once an exhaustive list was made, stakeholders were asked to “vote” on those priorities they felt were most important. The table below captures the highest priorities from each focus group and compares them to the others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Georgetown</th>
<th>McClellanville</th>
<th>Murrells Inlet</th>
<th>Port Royal</th>
<th>Shem Creek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the availability of commercial dock space because existing docks are full.</td>
<td>Solve the issue of rising land prices adjacent to the water pushing commercial fishing facilities (and support services) off the water’s edge.</td>
<td>Cutting/cold storage facility is a missing component.</td>
<td>Commercial facilities such as SC DHEC approved cutting facility/cold storage, parking for customers and crew, ice and fuel are all needed.</td>
<td>Address the volume of marine traffic in Shem Creek. Recreational boats, kayakers, paddle boarders and commercial fishermen all use the waterway. The creek is narrow and there is great variability in the size of the watercraft and ability of the captains of the crafts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize conflict at the crowded public boat landing between recreationalists and commercial shellfish farmers.</td>
<td>Decrease the issue of rising land prices adjacent to the water pushing commercial fishing facilities (and support services) off the water’s edge.</td>
<td>Cutting/cold storage facility is a missing component.</td>
<td>Commercial facilities such as SC DHEC approved cutting facility/cold storage, parking for customers and crew, ice and fuel are all needed.</td>
<td>Address the volume of marine traffic in Shem Creek. Recreational boats, kayakers, paddle boarders and commercial fishermen all use the waterway. The creek is narrow and there is great variability in the size of the watercraft and ability of the captains of the crafts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove derelict boats for both the aesthetic value to the viewed and the safety of boaters.</td>
<td>Lack of cohesively planned parking and pedestrian facilities (such as crosswalks) along Business 17 have created safety issues. Vehicle and pedestrian traffic are often in conflict; there is plenty of each, especially during the high tourist season.</td>
<td>Dredge the Marsh Walk (area in front of the restaurants) so that commercial and recreational boats can continue to tie up to these docks. The combination of boats at the docks plus residents and visitors walking along the boardwalk makes for a lively, active place.</td>
<td>Increase the demand for local seafood.</td>
<td>Increase the demand for local seafood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure funding for removal of abandoned and derelict vessels.</td>
<td>Ensure that the commercial fishermen are able to sell their product at a price which would allow them to stay in business.</td>
<td>Dredge the Marsh Walk (area in front of the restaurants) so that commercial and recreational boats can continue to tie up to these docks. The combination of boats at the docks plus residents and visitors walking along the boardwalk makes for a lively, active place.</td>
<td>Increase the demand for local seafood.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve traffic from the intracoastal waterway. Land-based facilities (such as hotels) away from the working waterfront will also be necessary to support water-based tourism.</td>
<td>Revitalization and redevelopment of the waterfront through a careful planning process that includes and benefits all stakeholders.</td>
<td>Revitalization and redevelopment of the waterfront through a careful planning process that includes and benefits all stakeholders.</td>
<td>Resident participation in the planning process to revitalize and develop the waterfront in a way that would benefit all.</td>
<td>Full participation in the planning process to tackle the current challenges with the waterway.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Physical Components

Common physical components across all five communities include: boat ramps, commercial ice and fuel facilities, restaurants, marinas, and seafood packing houses. In McClellanville rental houses were also considered part of the working waterfront. The working waterfront of Murrells Inlet includes the oyster beds and estuaries in between Murrells Inlet and Garden City.

Functional Components

“Functional component” refers to the role(s) of the working waterfront in the community. In all five of the communities the contributions of the working waterfront to the local economy is important. Commercial fishing continues to be viewed as an important component - some communities value the commercial components as a way to provide jobs, others value the capacity to sustain the local seafood supply as a premium product for area restaurants. Though there can be conflicts between commercial fishing and recreation or tourism, working waterfronts are also providing recreation activities for both coastal residents and visitors. Attracting tourists is an important part of the working waterfronts. In Port Royal, the working waterfront is also valued as an educational learning laboratory.
There was strong consensus on the physical components that do or should constitute a working waterfront in South Carolina. Representatives from all of the communities felt that viable working waterfronts can be a mix of commercial, recreational and tourist opportunities; they seem to realize that diversification is important to future viability. All five communities have expanded upon the traditional definition of a working waterfront with its focus on the commercial fishing industry.

What is different among the communities are the “next steps.” Each community has unique challenges to overcome. Differences in priorities identified by each community may be inherent to the community themselves, they may be due in part to the place along the path to a prosperous working waterfront that each community currently finds itself, or differences in how they envision their working waterfront in the future. With the differences, come opportunities for sharing knowledge. One community’s challenge may be another’s previous success.

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The Future of S. C. Working Waterfronts:
A Community Partnership Exploring Priorities

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