



The neighborhood

Case Study 4: Haynie-Sirrine Neighborhood, Greenville, South Carolina

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PROJECT AND CONTEXT DESCRIPTION

This is most usefully explained by briefly relating the history of the site and describing its key physical characteristics of centers, edges and streets.

History

In August 2001, the City of Greenville, in partnership with a joint venture of local property owners, real estate agents and developers, commissioned a public design charrette to create a master plan for the redevelopment of the Haynie-Sirrine neighborhood, a low-income African-American community just one mile south of Greenville city center. The ideas of residents, property owners, merchants, government agencies, and interested investors were aired and collected during an intensive six-day process.

The history the Haynie-Sirrine neighborhood is one of transition from its original farmland, to the commercial use in the 1890s of the site's mineral springs for the cure of illnesses caused by 'improper habits of living', to one of the first black urban communities within the city of Greenville. Settlement began around 1900 when the neighborhood became home to domestic servants, blacksmiths, hostlers, factory workers, hotel maids and cooks, chauffeurs and preachers.

By the second half of the twentieth century, most of the original springs had been culverted under new streets and the playing field for a local high school, and the neighborhood had stabilized into an active black working-class community of several hundred people. However, in the 1950s, a major road-widening project fractured the community into two halves when Church Street, the main road that passes through the community from southwest

to northeast on its way to the city center, was transformed into what the traffic engineers of the time called a six-lane 'superhighway'. In the adjacent middle-class white neighborhoods to the south it remained only four lanes wide, and it was widened to six lanes just for its length through the black community before reducing back to four lanes to cross a bridge over the Reedy River gorge that separates Haynie-Sirrine from downtown Greenville. For nearly 50 years this road has created a difficult and dangerous barrier to community life and accessibility (see Figure 10.1).

In the 1960s land immediately to the north of the community was developed as a standard strip shopping center, also with widened access roads. By the 1990s this had been abandoned, but was then adaptively reused by county government as offices. The old strip center has been put to good use, but no improvements have been made to the physical environment. Wide roads and seas of asphalt parking still dominate the townscape.

During the 1980s and 1990s the neighborhood suffered a further decline, characterized predominately by substandard housing, vacant property, deteriorating infrastructure and crime (see Figure 10.2). Yet many residents continued to make significant contributions, not just to their neighborhood, but also to the larger Greenville community. By their civic activism and quest for social equity, these individuals provided the foundation for the resurgence of the Haynie-Sirrine neighborhood. White neighborhoods to the south and west have retained their character and value due in large measure to the proximity to downtown and we shared the residents' conviction that there was no reason why Haynie-Sirrine could not enjoy its own renaissance.