The Sapelo Island Charrette

University of Georgia Marine Institute
University Architects
College of Environment and Design
Center for Community Design and Preservation
November 21-24, 2003
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Two graduate design studios, one in landscape architecture and the other historic preservation, joined forces to tackle preliminary master planning issues associated with the Marine Institute at Sapelo Island. The group focused primarily on the academic quad, which was formerly the agricultural, residential, office and mechanical complex built by R.J. Reynolds, Jr. in the early 20th Century. The complex was needed to keep the functions of the Island running smoothly. The Marine Institute still provides that function but in scientific and ecological terms now. The buildings were designed by August Constantine and, together with the famous Turkey Fountain designed by Fritz Zimmer, provide a beautiful canvas on which to conserve, enhance and perpetuate Sapelo’s handsome legacy.

Our task was easy when given the directive to work in paradise.

Our work is conceptual and our ideas are malleable. This work is a first step. Now the journey begins.
1. Development & maintenance must be prudent and reasonable.
   - Increase functionality
   - Use existing structures
   - Employ green building practices

2. Maintenance goals and objectives must be better defined.
   - Conserve architecture
   - Conserve the environment.
   - Maintain sense of place (sense of place defined by existing features, including architecture, landscapes, and ecology)
   - New construction should be compatible with existing features

3. Improve the experience for visitors and residents alike.
   - Improved sense of arrival
   - Clarified circulation and transportation
   - Consistent sign standards

4. Always reinforce academics & collaboration.
   - Encourage further student participation on site
   - Schedule ongoing design charrettes, studios and visual assessments for the entire Island

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**The Sapelo Principles**

*Primum non nocere*

First, Do No Harm

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Today there is no pull, no press of the clock on Sapelo. In this quiet heartfelt place it seems even the ravagers of time have laid down their arms, and walked away in peace.

from Sapelo Sojourn by Sandy Jones
The French word, Charrette means "cart" and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline. This use of the term is said to originate from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th Century, where proctors circulated a cart, or charrette, to collect final drawings while students frantically put finishing touches on their work.

Today the term has come to describe an intense creative period that is combined with public workshops and articulated community goals. The charrette is a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a plan. It is an insiders view expressed visually by outside experts.

It has been called a creative “tornado in reverse.” The process begins with a multitude of information scattered about and, with a flurry of activity, concludes in a coherent vision for a real place.

Sapelo Island’s UGA Marine Institute needs design assistance and preservation planning concepts. Who better to provide that than the College of Environment and Design? A charrette experience was born.

What is a Charrette? Why does Sapelo need one?
Objectives

Circulation
- Benefit the core users of UGAMI while accommodating locals/visitors/island administrative staff
- Get rid of clutter
- Diminish eyesores and increase gate-way opportunities
- Decrease amount of blacktop surfaces
- Better utilize "dead space" for consolidation of materials and facilities
- Increase "campus feel" (defined linear paths within quad, signage)
- Encourage use of space between apartments and old dorm for recreational use
- Reduce the number of vehicles to those that are purely essential
- Establish a primary vehicular entrance
- Establish a formal entry

Historic Preservation
- Conserve remaining tile roofs
- Perpetuate traditional construction techniques
- Better utilize existing buildings for UGAMI needs
- Return UGAMI to 1950's and 60's concept of natural outdoor conference facility
- Phase out temporary buildings from the last 25 years
- Restore tennis courts and replace fencing with black vinyl coated chain link
Development

- Make safety a priority and respond to needs for emergency care access and environmental education (snake bites/poison ivy/rip tide....)
- Provide detached residential replacements for mobile homes
- Improve overall physical appearance of the island, beginning with UGAMI
- Better integrate resources at UGA Athens in Sapelo programs (adult education/ecology/tourism/environmental design....)
- Interpret "zones" which are defined by natural landscape (smells, discoveries made when rounding corners)
- Continue to coordinate DNR's visitor management plan with UGAMI and Hog Hammock
- Phase improvements to better utilize labor and budgets
- Respect layers of history - palimpsest
- Explore alternative transportation options (bikes/hybrids/etc...)

Environment

- Develop policy for limiting or perpetuating invasive ornamental and exotic species that were used historically (bamboo, wisteria, etc.)
- A mowing management plan should decrease acres mowed and frequency
- Identify and use "deer resistant" plants
- Encourage friendly co-existence among all living things on the island
- Practice eco-friendly initiatives, especially relating to water and energy
- Protect the night sky
- Screen and/or relocate propane tanks
- Create a connection to the water garden
- Do not interrupt views to the marsh
- Relate buildings and trees through design (framed views)
General
These are 'first-glance' observations and studies taken from November 21-24, 2003. We encourage that many of these recommendations should be explored and implemented over time. We consider this the first step of many.

Vehicles
- Park and store all vehicles in a new parking area northwest of Dairy Barn
- Reduce fleet to only the ESSENTIAL and operational vehicles (15-20)
- Consolidate all auto repair to one area that is located adjacent to the 'Main Campus'
- Limit vehicular traffic in Center Quad to drop-off/pick-up/loading ONLY-parking should be in newly-established parking area
- Vehicles should never be parked close to or under trees
- Consider use of alternative transportation (i.e. electric/low-impact/hybrid vehicles, bicycles)
Main campus (including Center Quad)

- Rehabilitate old dormitory building
- Create gathering area between apartments and rehabilitated dormitory building with additional patio and grilling space. Consider creating gathering areas off the back doors and kitchens of the apartment building
- Use native plants resistant to deer around Center Quad and building surroundings
- Rehabilitate turkey fountain
- Walkway around edge of Center Quad green should be 8'-10' wide. Paths crossing the green should be between 6'-8' wide
- Investigate alternative materials for new and existing pathways in Center Quad and new parking area (crushed shells or possibly a porous concrete)
- Remove dead tree in Center Quad. Additional trees should help anchor corners, frame views of buildings
- Create gathering area around rehabilitated old power building, possibly including a shaded area and with a view to the marsh
- Provide directional signage as necessary, in keeping with architectural and natural materials
- Create 'gateway' feature as primary pedestrian entrance, helping to establish a strong 'sense of identity' for the campus
- Across from 'gateway' provide boardwalk onto center island of water garden. Additional boardwalk from center island to residential area should be considered.
- Paths inside Center Quad should be linear, but paths outside Quad should be sinuous
Approach to Main Campus

- Create sense of arrival with oak trees on right side of road and entrance signage
- The primary vehicular entrance (leading to the parking lot) should be established; this includes the establishment of a formal entry sequence of spaces leading up to the dairy barn
- Live oaks should be spaced to frame view of barn and screen stored/parked vehicles
What Will the Changes Look Like?

A new pedestrian entry pergola or arbor better defines a visitor’s entrance into the quad.

A restored fountain and strong horizontal axis gives the academic quad a renewed sense of balance.

The new parking area can be defined with simple vernacular fencing to direct and contain vehicular traffic.

An enhanced entrance from the new parking area gives a new fresh face to UGAMI.
In preparing for a property renovation, the first step is to evaluate the current use of the buildings. Often, facilities are found to be underused or misused and "new" space can be found without new construction. The UGAMI campus is no exception to this rule.

The charrette team took a complete inventory of the buildings on the main campus and evaluated each for historic use and current use. Ultimately, each facility was judged as either "fully utilized" or "underutilized." A map of this breakdown is shown in the illustration.
With this information in hand, the team set to the task of determining the ideal use for each building, focusing on those that are currently underused and taking into consideration UGAMI’s space needs. Careful attention was paid to circulation patterns and logical groupings by use type. The result is shown in the drawing.

To improve clarity and simplify planning, the buildings are divided into three use types: residential, work space, and support facilities. The residential component includes both staff and visitor housing, work space includes scientific and office facilities, and the support facilities include leisure and dining areas, storage and mechanical/repair structures.

The breakdown the team came up with is a logical arrangement, but it will benefit from evaluation by the end users: the UGAMI staff. Some buildings could be used in more than one capacity or be changed altogether. Primary uses are labeled “1” and alternatives are labeled “2”.

Proposed Use for Buildings
The underutilized end buildings need to be rehabilitated to reflect large door openings. Plate glass with an interior hallway can achieve sensitive conversion for additional dormitory space or office space.

Inappropriate infill of openings has compromised the architectural integrity of the historic carriage buildings.

The former power house can easily be transformed into a new dining hall and meeting spaces.
# Building Reuse Strategy for Old Dormitory

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTERNATIVE USES</th>
<th>Degree of intervention</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
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</table>
| Continued use as dormitory space without changing building components | Low  
Shore-up failing structural system and devise new roof system | Original function, easy and true interpretation | Expense |
| Extension and enhancement of (for profit) Reynolds Mansion facility, retain many significant historic/architectural features | High  
Retention of original historic fabric | Income stream from rentals can pay for building maintenance, and guesthouse space can be shared as dormitory space | Does not advance the academic mission of UGAMI |
| Remodel interior to house new dormitories | Medium  
Maintain exterior "shell," gut and re-work inside | Exterior architectural integrity remains | Complete loss of interior significant features |

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| Demolish and reconstruct based on original plans | Very High  
Reconstruction enables complete story being told | Site interpretation remains clear and straightforward | Expense, and difficulty in finding craftsmen and materials |
| Construct compatible new structure on original footprint, with massing, scale and materials related to the site’s context | Very High  
No historic fabric is retained, original building's history lost and only feature remaining is the building's footprint | No loss of visual character | Expense and complete loss of historic fabric |
| Demolish existing structure, no replacement, moving dormitory function to another location on site | Extremely High  
No historic character is retained | New contemporary dormitory space | Expense, new ground disturbance and abandoned infrastructure of original site |
Advocacy Ideas for Retention of Historic Dormitory

- The dormitory predates the UGAMI complex and tells a unique story about the development of the Island. It plays an important role in the total interpretation of the district, and its loss would severely compromise an accurate and authentic experience for visitors.
- The possibility of creating a space that can be shared by both the UGAMI and the Reynolds Mansion is a positive aspect emphasizing collaboration between DNR and UGA, and can serve as an income generating mechanism to help defray rehab and maintenance costs.
- The effort to save the dormitory can coalesce supporters for the retention and restoration or rehabilitation of the structure, and other historic structures on the island.
- Get a "second opinion" to reassess the numbers and strategy with a more sensitive rehabilitation that does not involve the "gutting" of the historic building.
- A partnership with DNR (and others) to save the building will further a positive interaction between state agencies, no matter the cost, based on the structure’s historic significance, not bare budget considerations.
- The renewed preservation fervor for the old dormitory can undergird a fundraising strategy to seek outside investment for the building’s continued existence.
Landscape Management Recommendations

Academic Quad

The quad should serve as an outdoor gathering space for researchers. The strong central axis directs pedestrians across the quad and unites the architectural units through a symmetrical planting design. The space possesses an appropriate scale for meeting informally as well as walking easily from building to building.

- **Provide shade**
  - Plant two live oaks on southern side to complete symmetry of shade trees within the quad
  - Underplant live oaks for future replacement of older trees

- **Supply movable furniture**

- **Decrease vehicular presence**

- **Maintain current axis**

- **Define edges of quad with hedge material between the main house and the academic quad.**
Water Garden

The water garden represents a historically significant landscape designed by Howard Coffin in 1923. It is an extension of the west axis from the Reynolds Mansion that provides a connection between the main house and the academic quad. Given the historic value and the linkage between the architectural features, restoration is recommended.

- Repair existing bridges (2)
- Clear path of debris and overgrown vegetation
- Move picnic table from central walkway
- Repair arbor and expose paving surface
- Remove vegetation so views of quad are visible
- Add bridge to connect to adjoining island with arbor to UGAMI quad
- Adjoin one of the existing bridged islands to another pond island not currently accessible
- Leave existing bamboo except at bridge entrance
- Replace and create additional educational and safety signage
- Address aquatic vegetation through professional consultation
  - Duckweed (*Lemna minor*)
  - Dollar weed (*Rhynchosia reniformis*)
  - Cattails (*Carex typhina*)

Live Oak Grove

The live oak grove is an integral cultural landscape feature of the Reynolds Mansion estate. The grove requires routine maintenance to retain its aesthetic and historical appearance.

- Preserve views to and from mansion, UGAMI, dormitory and water garden
- Regular mowing maintenance within designated perimeter
- Remove deadfall within perimeter boundary
- Remove selected plant species within perimeter boundary, including, but not limited to:
  - Cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*)
  - Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)
  - Bamboo (*Bambusa spp.*)
  - Grape vine (*Vitis spp.*)
- Continue to mow in areas outside perimeter that are currently maintained, but not as often as within perimeter boundary. Deadfall and native species such as cabbage palm and yaupon holly may remain
- Begin live oak replanting with deer cages
- Maintain vegetative swale along roadside
- Consult with professional arborist and urban forester

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Dormitory / Tennis Court

- The dormitory and tennis court are part of the historic architectural stock and should be maintained.
- Regular mowing maintenance around dormitory and tennis court, including removal of deadfall and selected plant species.
- Continue to mow area between dormitory and apartment buildings.

Orchard / Allée

The orchard and allée represent historical landscape features built by Howard Coffin. The orchard is currently in poor condition with many snags and a majority of trees missing. The allée is no longer in existence.

- Discontinue mowing in the orchard area to allow natural succession.
- Annually mow within the allée area with a regularly mowed pathway to the greenhouse complex.

Remains of the Tennis Court

Historic cypress and palms

Remains of the Orchard

Remains of the Orchard

Former Allée
Greenhouse Complex / Rock Garden

The greenhouse complex is a historically significant complex built by Howard Coffin in the 1920s. There may be a potential to restore this complex through funds provided by private garden clubs.

- The landscape leading to the complex should be maintained and possibly restored when the future of the greenhouses is determined (i.e. re-creation of the allée and designed plantings surrounding greenhouses). If additional funding were secured, restoration of the rock garden would be recommended.
- Maintain mow schedule around greenhouse complex.

Large mowed grass areas beyond quad

- There are several large areas currently being mowed that may not require routine maintenance depending on the area's function. For example, these areas could be mowed less often or allowed to go into natural succession. Assessment of the current mowing regime is recommended.
Old Dormitory solution
Greenhouse complex feasibility study, charrette and reuse plan
What to do with agricultural fields?
Creative approach to development and/or new construction with a semi-permanent design/build class similar to Auburn University’s Rural Studio studio in central Alabama
Restore the turkey fountain
Integrate outparcels
Restore tennis courts
Restore all pools, water gardens and fountains
Develop a permanent solution for trailer replacement and removal
Design space between apartments and old dormitory
Pay attention to the marsh with sensitive linkages and interpretation to campus (acknowledge and enhance)
Maintenance of trees (have an arborist assess tree health), support and perpetuate tree replacement program started by DNR

Future Directions

UGA MLA thesis, BLA terminal project or Public Service and Outreach project to interpret water garden (“the continents”)
Expanded property management plan to define sensitive maintenance and green practices for selected historic, cultural and environmental resources
Create sense of arrival on the island from the ferry
Communication with and between island agencies and groups (DNR, UGAMI, Hog Hammock, UGA Athens departments)
Preservation of building exteriors
New construction for laboratories and replacement functions for former outdated laboratory space
Cooperation with UGA’s Art Department to provide artwork (drawings, paintings, photographs and sculpture) for buildings at UGAMI
Assessment of permeability and storm water management for roadways and sidewalks
We are so lucky to have been able to work in a beautiful place with such supportive folks. Jon Garbisch, UGAMI Outreach Director, and Scott Messer, Campus Architects, were terrific allies for us to complete our work quickly with great inspiration. The fine cooking at Lula’s in Hog Hammock and the knowledge of DNR’s Buddy Sullivan made all of us feel welcome. Paul Cassily and Kevin Kirschke, also from Campus Architects, were equally helpful and made great partners for producing these concepts and ideas.

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