

TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

# kiawahnext



## Acknowledgements

---

The planning process was managed by the staff of the Town of Kiawah Island, supported by a team of consultants and additional town staff, steered by the Planning Commission, adopted by the Mayor and Town Council, and envisioned by the residents of Kiawah Island.

### TOWN COUNCIL

Mayor Bradley D. Belt

Mayor Pro Tempore Russell Berner

Council Member E. Luke Farrell

Council Member Madeleine Kaye

(Former) Council Member Dr. Michael Heidingsfelder

### PLANNING COMMISSION

William Dowdy, Chair

Larry Iwan, Vice-Chair

Eugene Babinec

Andrew J. Capelli

John Connolly

Ronald Curran, MD

Joanne K. Hennessy

### TOWN STAFF

Stephanie M. Tillerson, Town Administrator

John Taylor, Jr., Planning Director

Bruce Spicher

Jim Jordan

Petra Reynolds

Brian Gottshalk

Dorota Szubert

## Table of Contents

---

*part one: approach*

08 **vision**

12 **process**

*part two: analyze*

24 **municipal processes**

32 **population**

42 **economic development**

54 **natural resources**

74 **cultural resources**

84 **community facilities**

108 **housing**

124 **land use**

136 **transportation**

156 **priority investments**

166 **resiliency**

*part three: action*

180 **implementation**



a bold vision for  
**Kiawah's bright future**

**01** vision

**02** process

**kiawah**  **next**  
**part one: approach**

# visionnext

*The Town of Kiawah Island is a residential community incorporating a world-class resort and a unique, vibrant shopping village within a natural maritime setting that is being preserved and enhanced for current and future generations.*

The **KiawahNext Comprehensive Plan** is a guiding document for the Town of Kiawah Island, aligning with its vision to maintain a harmonious residential community that seamlessly integrates a world-class resort and vibrant shopping village within a naturally preserved maritime setting. This plan, reviewed and updated by the Planning Commission with public input and support from Town staff, outlines strategic goals and objectives to guide future Town Council actions on land use, public facilities, economic development, housing, and natural and cultural resources.

Central to the plan is the concept of **Resiliency**, which emphasizes the community’s capacity to adapt and thrive amidst changing conditions and stresses. This comprehensive approach ensures that development on Kiawah Island is in harmony with the environment and resilient to natural hazards. The plan also incorporates detailed elements South Carolina State Law requires, such as economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, housing, land use, transportation, and priority investments.

The **KiawahNext Comprehensive Plan** is a collaborative effort involving community and stakeholder engagement to ensure that it reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of all who call Kiawah Island home. The plan aims to balance high-quality development with preserving Kiawah’s unique natural beauty and cultural heritage, fostering a vibrant and sustainable future for the island community.

We understand the unparalleled potential for Kiawah to forge a timeless and resilient coastal village.

## timeless

[ tahym-lis ]

*of a rich and pure quality that does not change over time and season. Beautiful and enduring ideas that transcend.*

## resilient

[ ri-zil-yuhnt ]

*of a strong, abundant, and irrepressible disposition that can withstand, grow, and thrive in the face of a multitude of conditions.*

## coastal

[ kohs-tl ]

*of, apart of, or relating to the land that adjoins and circumscribes an ocean. Reverence of its waters, systems, habitats, and communities.*

## village

[ vil-ij ]

*a self-sustaining community, including the landscapes, buildings, customs, and leadership that contribute to its livelihood and culture.*

INTRODUCTION

**What Is A Comprehensive Plan?**

The Town of Kiawah Island Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted by the Town Council in 1994. SC State Law § 6-29-510 requires that Planning Commissions review the Comprehensive Plan or elements no less than once every five years to determine whether changes in the amount, kind, or direction of

**Governance Structure (GS)**

Unlike the other ten elements, the State does not require this element. It is meant to consider the duties and processes of the town government, apart from the other elements.

**Population (P)**

Considers historic trends and projections, household numbers and sizes, educational levels, and income characteristics.

**Economic Development (ED)**

Considers labor force and labor force characteristics, employment by place of work and residence, and analysis of the economic base.

**Natural Resources (NR)**

Considers coastal resources, slope characteristics, prime agricultural and forest land, plant and animal habitats, parks and recreation areas, scenic views and sites, wetlands, and soil types.

**Cultural Resources (CR)**

Considers historic buildings and structures, commercial districts, residential districts, unique, natural, or scenic resources, archaeological, and other cultural resources.

**Community Facilities (CF)**

Considers water supply, treatment, and distribution; sewage system and wastewater treatment; solid waste collection and disposal, fire protection, emergency medical services, and general government facilities; education facilities; and libraries and other facilities.

development of the area or other reasons make it desirable to make additions or amendments to the plan. The Town of Kiawah Island Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2020. This document includes the following planning elements and satisfies SC State Law § 6-29-510 requirements:

**Housing (H)**

Considers location, types, age, and condition of housing, owner and renter occupancy, and affordability of housing.

**Land Use (LU)**

Considers existing and future land use by categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, mining, public and quasi-public, recreation, parks, open space, and vacant or undeveloped.

**Transportation (T)**

Considers transportation facilities, including major road improvements, new road construction, transit projects, pedestrian and bicycle projects, and other elements of a transportation network.

**Priority Investment (PI)**

Analyzes the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the next ten years and recommends the projects for expenditure of those funds during the next ten years for needed public infrastructure and facilities.

**Resiliency (R)**

Considers the impacts of flooding, high water, and natural hazards on individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, economic development, public infrastructure and facilities, and public health, safety, and welfare.

KiawahNext adapts the required elements to Kiawah Island’s Vision:



*Display and communicate the processes of unique Town and stakeholder*



*Understand the diverse populations of Kiawah today and tomorrow.*



*Analyze trends for the success and prosperity of all Kiawah stakeholders.*



*Preserve Kiawah’s greatest natural assets and habitat.*



*Amplify and celebrate Kiawah’s unique cultures, customs and heritage.*



*Maintain and improve Kiawah’s world-class amenities, utilities, and services.*



*Continue Kiawah’s excellent reputation as a vibrant coastal village.*



*Identify and promote strategies for smart, sustainable, and controlled development.*



*Provide safe mobility options for Kiawah residents, workers and guests.*



*Strategically invest in Kiawah’s critical and most at-risk infrastructure.*



*Protecting all Kiawah residents and stakeholders from environmental impacts.*

# processnext

*The KiawahNext Comprehensive Plan is a document crafted for, alongside, and by the people of Kiawah Island. This group consists of various people: the homeowner, the seasonal resident, the worker, the resort staff, the business owner, and the guest. All these types of people have a stake in Kiawah’s success.*

## Overview

The development of the KiawahNext Comprehensive Plan was a collaborative, year-long process. The planning process relied heavily on community and stakeholder input, which included social media, town halls, and digital surveys on the KiawahNext web page.

The engagement campaign was designed to create meaningful and inviting opportunities for community involvement. By focusing on inclusivity and robust participation, this approach led to a more comprehensive and representative planning process compared to previous efforts. The campaign prioritized diverse community input, resulting in a thorough and collaborative approach to shaping the town’s future.

## Timeline

### February - March 2023 Stakeholder Engagement

In February and March, the planning team hosted 36 focused conversations with key stakeholders who share a vested interest in Kiawah’s success and are knowledgeable to unique subject matter expertise, based on their background or roles. This insight into the workings of Kiawah Island was critical to informing the plan.

### February - July 2023 Community Engagement

The planning team hosted a community survey on the project website, which is home base for digital engagement. This, paired with an in-person survey event at Freshfields Villages, provided vital feedback to kick-start the planning process.

### April - November 2024 (TBD) Finalizing the Plan

After public discussion at the Planning Commission meetings, additional revisions were made, the final draft was presented to the Planning Commission and Town Council for adoption.

## Project Inputs

The community and stakeholder engagement process was designed to capture a wide range of views, ensuring that the planning process could be approached impartially with diverse viewpoints in mind. A series of engagement sessions were conducted using various means and methods to reach the greatest extent of Kiawah Island populations possible. This comprehensive approach aimed to include perspectives from all segments of

the community, fostering a more inclusive and representative planning process.

The large-scale trends in responses informed the planning process, while also being guided by professionals’ knowledge of best practices and research on transportation, ecological, and socioeconomic systems.



INTRODUCTION

**Community Response**

From February until July of 2023, the Kiawah Next team hosted community engagement events and opportunities, both in-person and digital. The responses to the digital and in-person surveys, and examples of community members expressing their goals and aspirations for Kiawah, have been recorded and displayed in this document.

survey. This was the most far reaching of the engagement opportunities and provided the planning team with the most accurate data on the types of respondents to the survey. The results of these surveys are shown on the subsequent pages.

The digital survey hosted on the project website had more than 2,800 people visit the site, while 850 individuals responded to the

**#2,832**  
Unique Visitors to Website

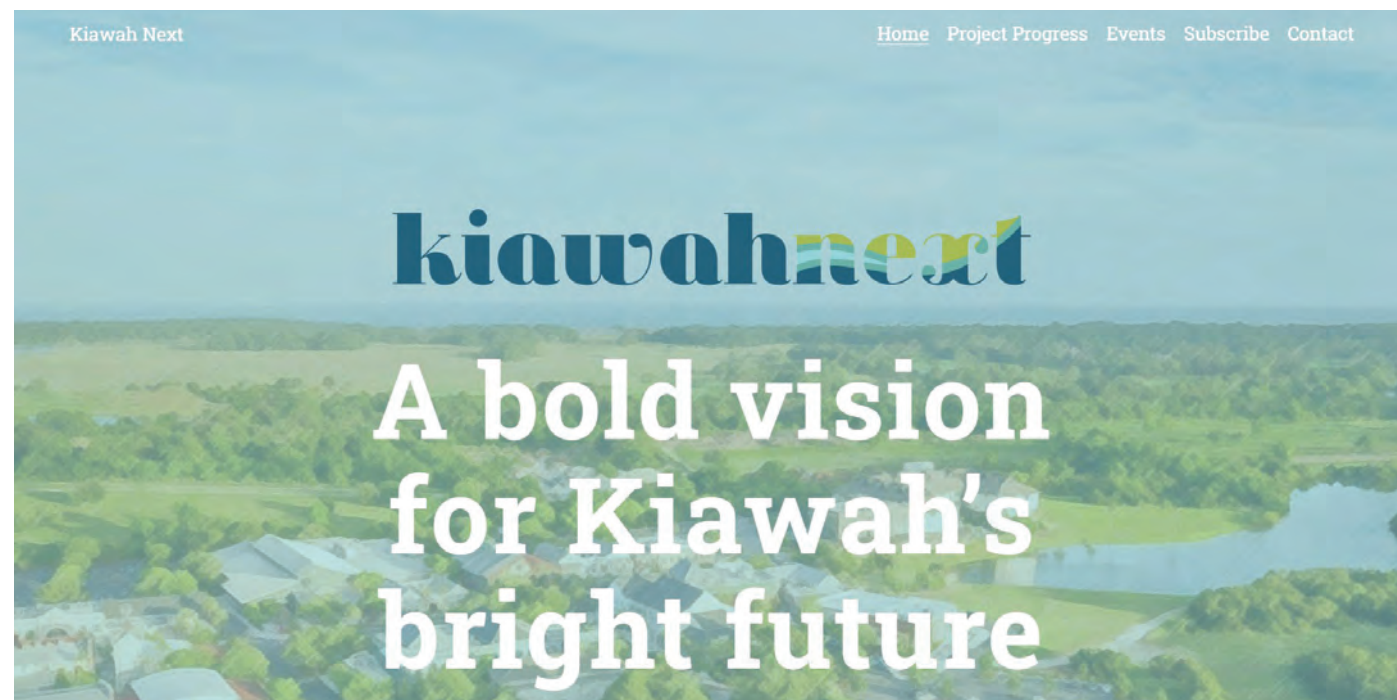
**140.7%**  
Unique Visitors as a Percentage of Kiawah's 2020 census population

**#3,567**  
Total Website Views To-Date

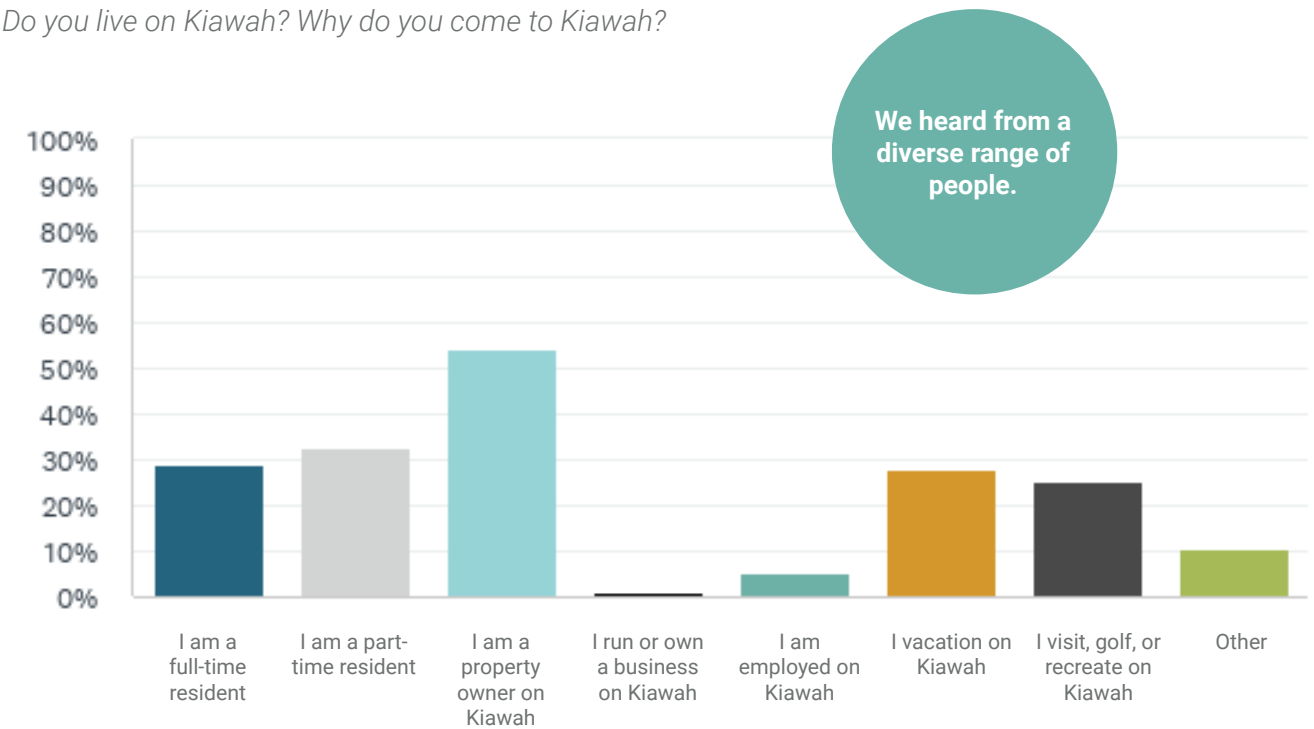
**#847**  
Survey Respondents

**#10,511**  
Survey Question Responses

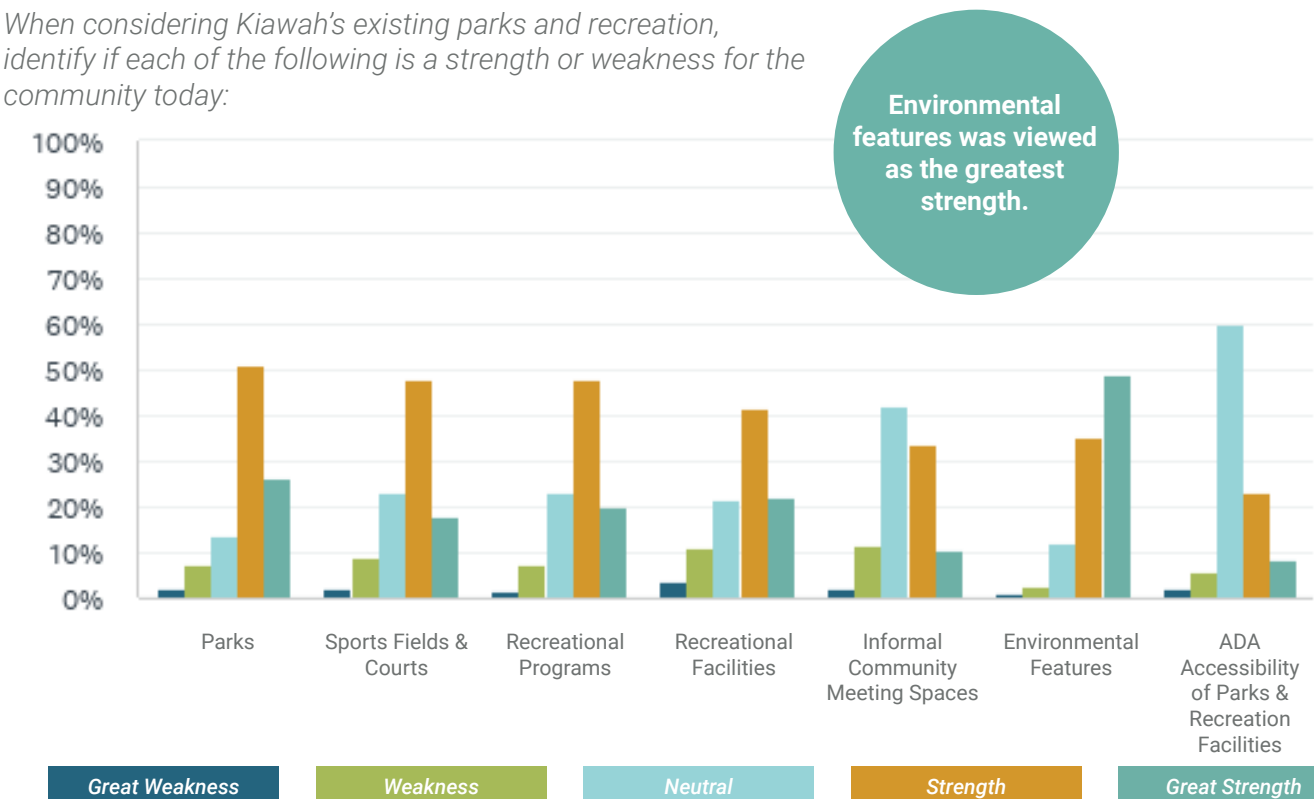
Welcome page to [kiawahnext.com](http://kiawahnext.com) for on-line information, surveys, and plan updates.



Do you live on Kiawah? Why do you come to Kiawah?

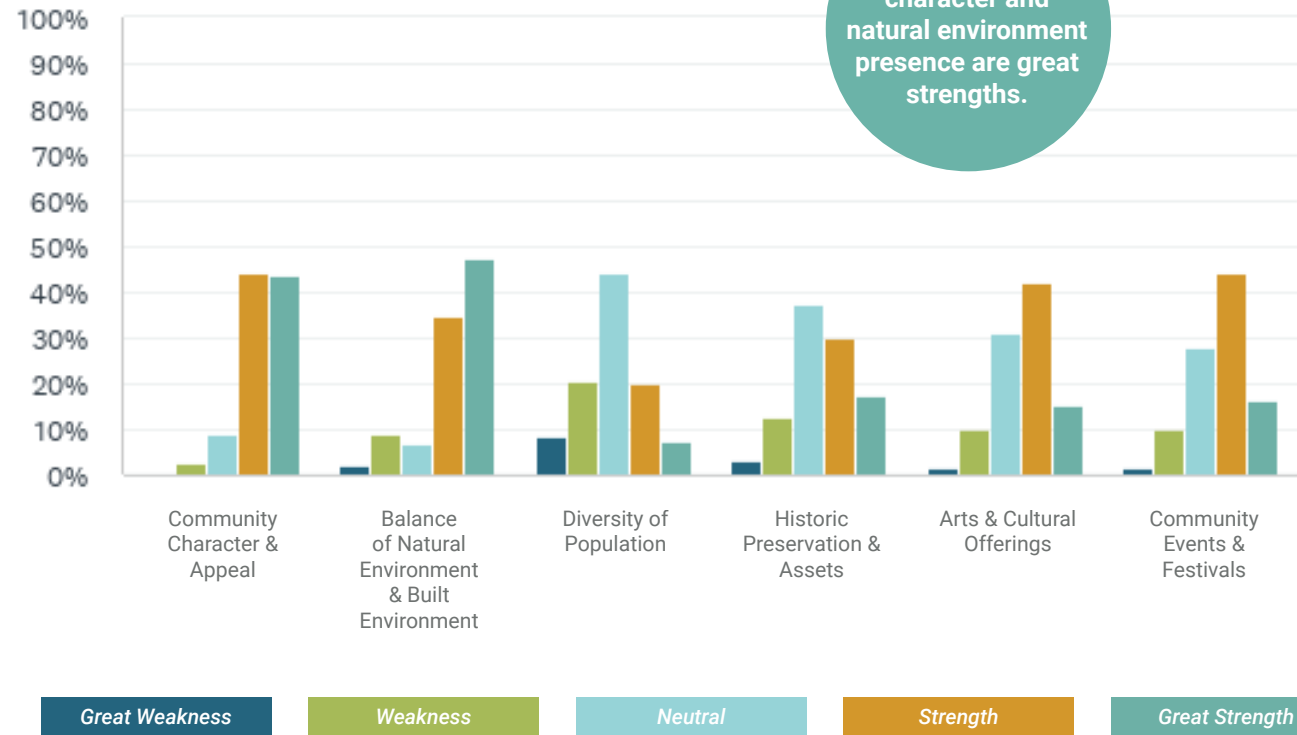


When considering Kiawah's existing parks and recreation, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



INTRODUCTION

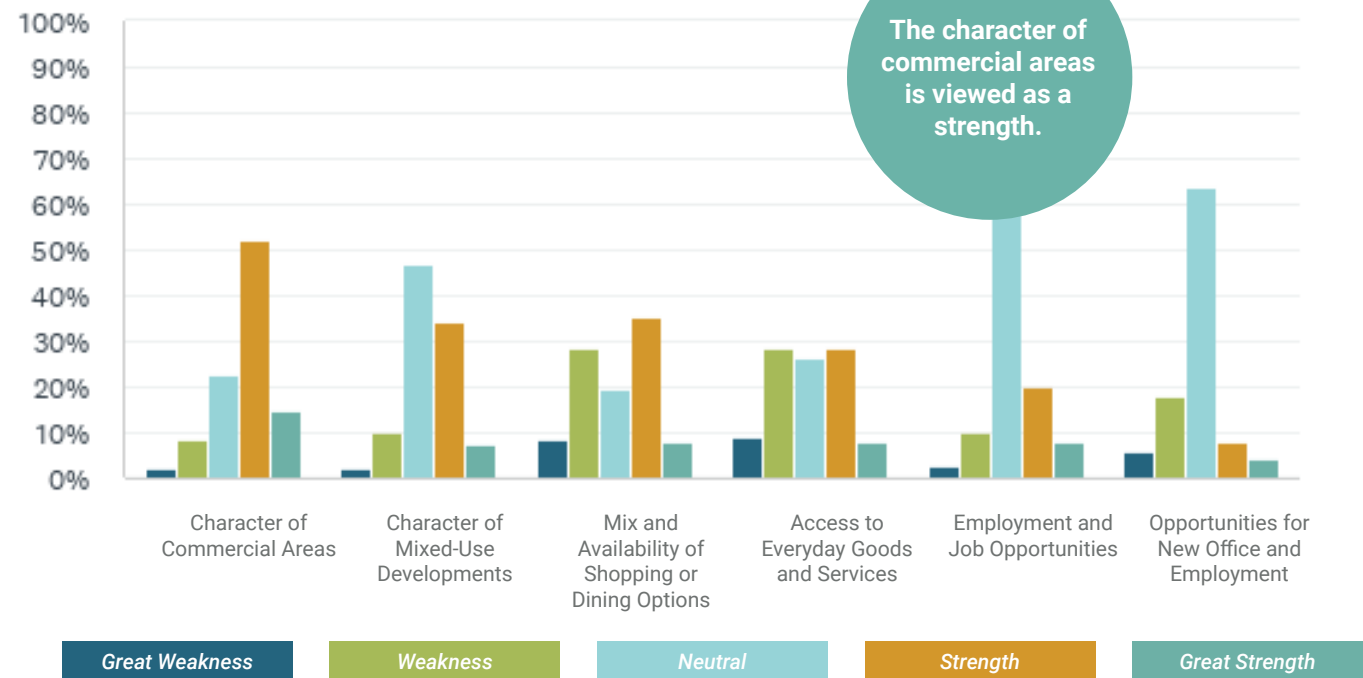
When considering Kiawah's culture and identity, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



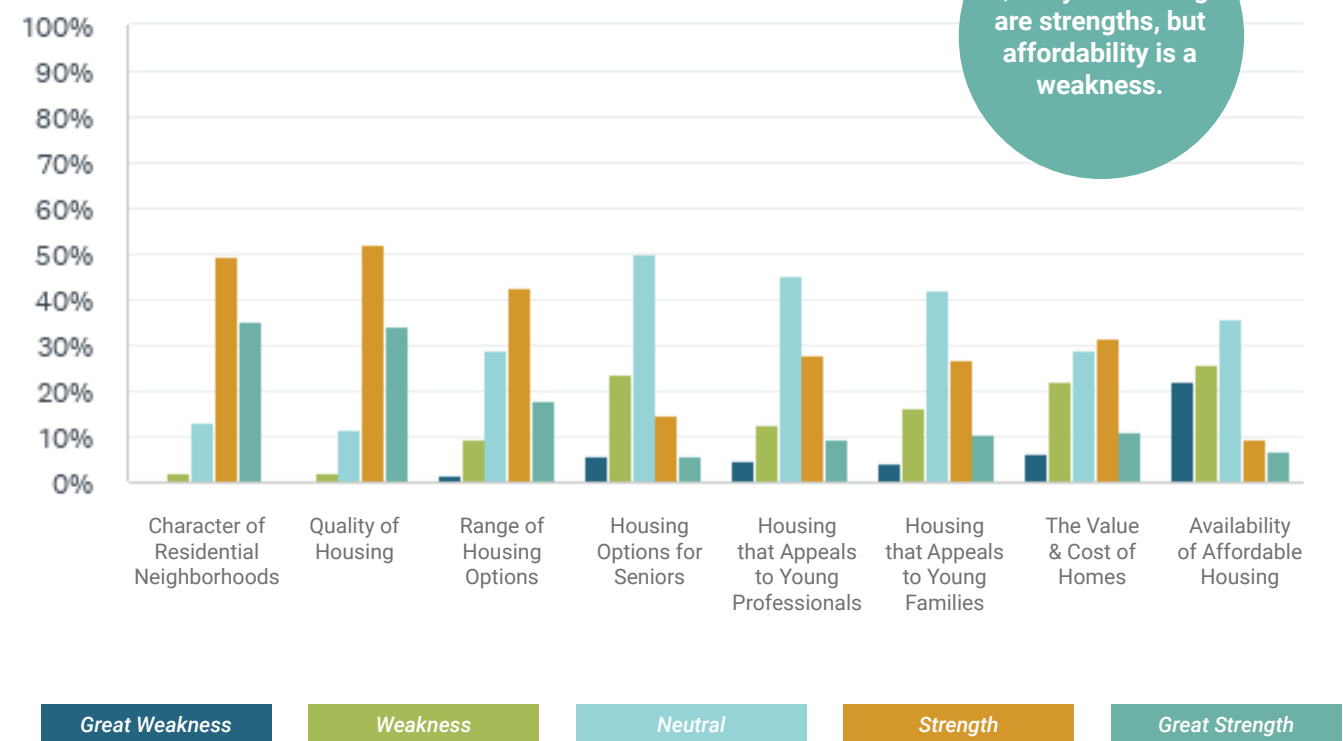
What kind of impact would each of the following types of residential development have on the community?



When considering Kiawah's existing commercial areas, identify if each is a strength or weakness for the community today:

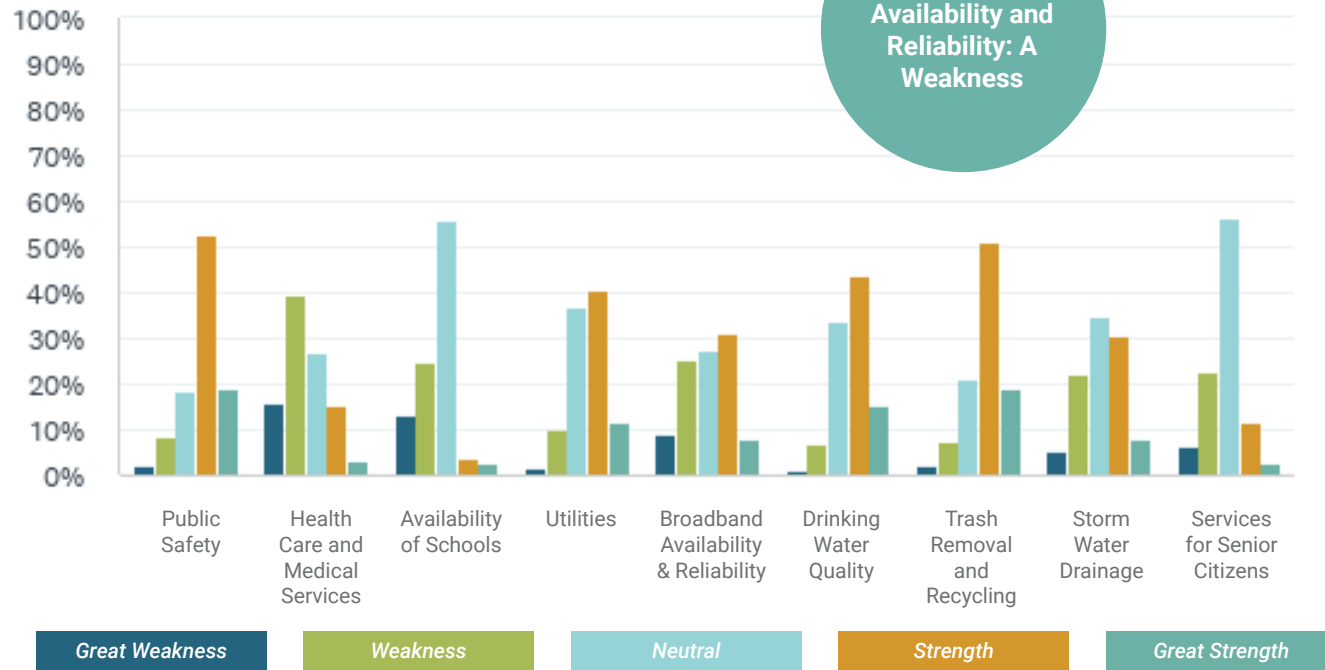


When considering existing housing and residential areas, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for Kiawah today:

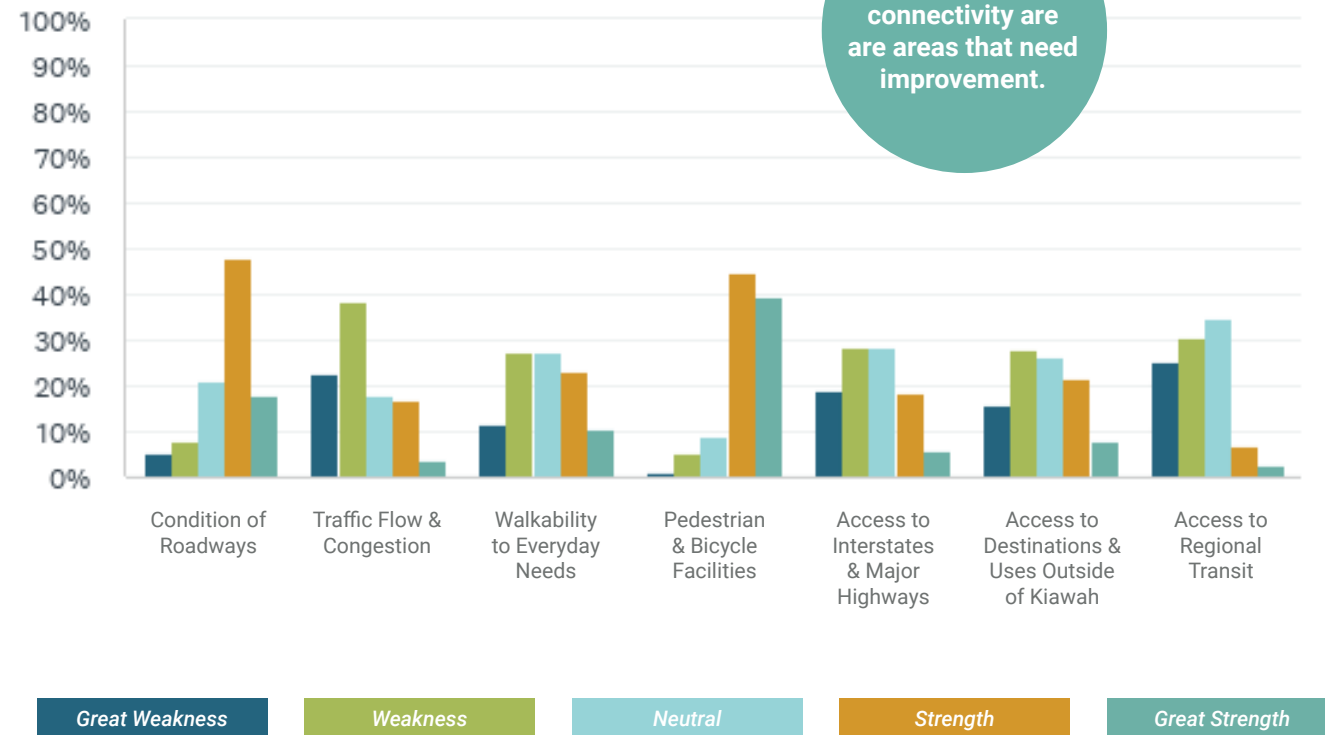


INTRODUCTION

When considering Kiawah's existing community facilities and services, identify if each of the following is currently a strength or weakness:



When considering Kiawah's existing transportation networks, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



Previous Plans and Efforts

**KiawahNext replaces the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, later revised in 2019. It synthesizes the studies, research, and recommendations from a wide variety of recent plans and documents to create a unified strategy for the Town of Kiawah Island. Other adopted plans, studies, and efforts included in this plan:**

**Town of Kiawah Island Planning Plans and Efforts**

**“Native Plant Database”, Town of Kiawah Island**

An on-line database of native trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, ferns, and grasses that provides detailed information on growing conditions, size, flowering information, salt tolerance, deer resistance, and the wildlife value for each plant.

**The 2020 Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan**

The plan serves as a planning and decision-making tool to inform the past and current state of the beach and the aimed efforts to maintain and improve its quality.

**“Bird Research”, Town of Kiawah Island**

Kiawah Biologists conducted research projects involving Kiawah’s diverse bird population. Capturing birds and banding them with a unique identifier gives biologists insight into the health and demographics of our island’s bird population.

**“White-tailed Deer”, Town of Kiawah Island**

Surveys are currently conducted for 2 consecutive nights during September/October and December/January. The survey is 18.2 miles long and covers most of Kiawah Island.

**“American Alligators”, Town of Kiawah Island**

Conducted annually, the survey route covers most of the ponds on the island. The total number of alligators are recorded along with an estimate of their length.

**“Save Kiawah Bobcats”, Town of Kiawah Island**

The Kiawah Bobcat GPS Project is the longest, continuous GPS study on bobcats in the world and was developed by the Town of Kiawah Island, in partnership with the Kiawah Conservancy, in 2007.

**Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan**

The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan (CMMP) is envisioned to be a living document that focuses solely on the marsh and brings together various tools for its management.

**Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update**

The Town of Kiawah Island Town Council collected traffic data as well as Intersection and Corridor studies in 2022.

**Kiawah Island Housing Market Study**

The Town of Kiawah Island engaged HR&A to conduct a market study assessing the long-term health of Kiawah’s housing market that was completed in August of 2020.

**Budget at a Glance**

The Town of Kiawah Island’s fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. Town Council adopts a budget each year to allocate funds for the many programs, services, and projects provided for residents and visitors.

**Kiawah Goes Green Initiative**

This initiative is targeted to formalize a strong commitment by Kiawah’s major entities, stakeholders and the entire community to continue our strong focus on environmental stewardship, sustainability and advancement of eco-friendly public and private practices across the entire island.



**Emergency Preparedness Plan**

The risk of severe hurricane effects and the remote location of the Island combine to make hurricanes a double threat to Kiawah Island and its population.

**Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation for Kiawah Island, SC**

This report attempts to identify ways in which Kiawah might be impacted by rising seas and changing weather patterns, to assess Kiawah’s potential vulnerabilities to those changes, and to suggest practical actions that Kiawah might take to mitigate those vulnerabilities and ensure a prosperous future.

**Annexation Policy Plan & Procedures Manual**

This plan outlines the process and intent of annexation into the Town. Annexation is transferring parcels of land from unincorporated areas of Charleston County into the service area and jurisdiction of the Town of Kiawah Island.

**Kiawah Island Stakeholders Plans and Documents:**

**Kiawah Conservancy 2030 Strategic Plan**

Lays a foundation to guide a path for the continued success of the natural beauty and ecological health of Kiawah Island for generations to come.

**Kiawah Island Architectural Review Board Standards and Guidelines**

- “Design With Nature”, Intended to encourage construction of excellent architectural design that is appropriate to the surroundings and to the special conditions of climate and other environmental factors indigenous to Kiawah.

**Kiawah Island Property Report**

Kiawah Island Real Estate composed this report sharing sales data trends on the island.



part two: plan elements

- 01** governance structure
- 02** population
- 03** economic development
- 04** natural resources
- 05** cultural resources
- 06** community facilities
- 07** housing
- 08** land use
- 09** transportation
- 10** priority investments
- 11** resiliency

01

**kiawah**next  
part xxx: title





# governance structure<sub>next</sub>

**Goal: To display and communicate the processes of unique Town and stakeholder governance.**

## Governance Structure

Unlike the other ten elements, the State does not require this element. It is meant to consider the duties and processes of the town government, apart from the other elements.

## Big Ideas

Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA)

## Objectives

MP1 - Increase usage and effectiveness of existing communication channels.

MP2 - Improve outreach to part-time residents and visitors.

MP3 - Enhance two-way communication between the Town and its constituents.

MP4 - Establish and effectively operate the Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA).

MP5 - Streamline decision-making processes within the Town government.

MP6 - Enhance interdepartmental collaboration and communication.

## Overview

Kiawah Island operates under a unique governance structure. The Town of Kiawah Island (TOKI) is responsible for core municipal functions such as public safety, zoning, and building services. Meanwhile, the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA), which serves as the master homeowners association, manages many aspects of daily community life, including maintenance of KICA-owned infrastructure and operation of community amenities.

This governance structure presents both opportunities and challenges. While TOKI and KICA have distinct functions and responsibilities, cooperation and collaboration between them are critical to addressing many of the island's most important challenges. The two entities work together to ensure efficient island management, impacting community engagement, long-term planning, and overall quality of life.

Understanding this governance model is crucial for the effective implementation of the comprehensive plan, as it influences decision-making, resource allocation, and community development strategies. The success of Kiawah Island's future initiatives largely depends on the continued coordination between TOKI and KICA in serving the community's needs and aspirations.

## TOKI Government Structure

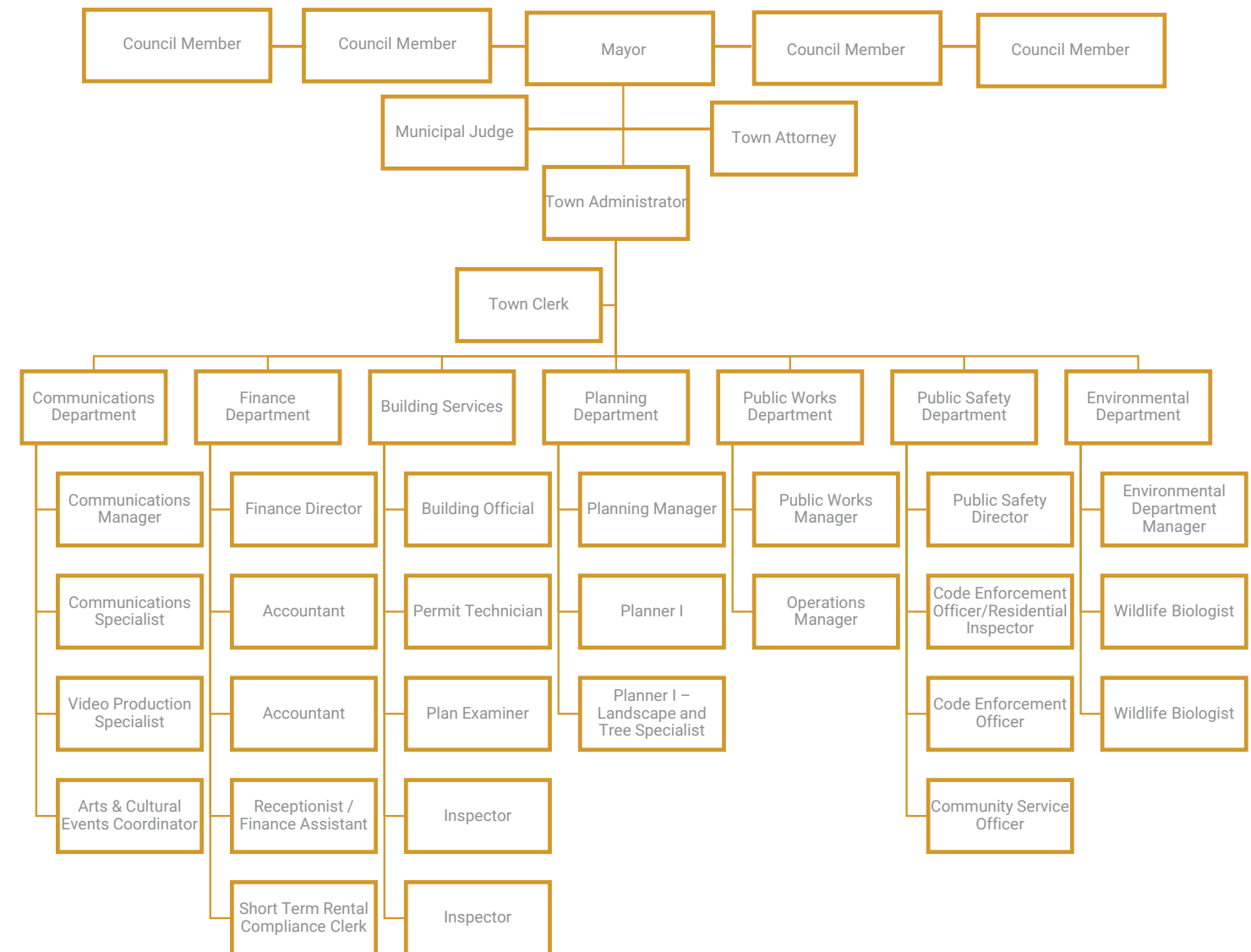
The Town of Kiawah Island operates under a mayor-council form of government. The Town Council, comprising a mayor and four council members, sets policies governing Town operations and affairs.

The mayor serves as the chief executive, responsible for implementing Council policies and overseeing Town operations. Working in close collaboration with the mayor is the Town Administrator, who manages day-to-day affairs and provides support to both the mayor

and council members. Since its incorporation in 1988, the Town has grown substantially, expanding from a single employee to a staff of 28 full-time professionals.

The Town utilizes both statutory and special committees to enhance its governance. These committees review and recommend policies, activities, and ordinances, providing valuable input to the Town Council and supporting informed decision-making.

Town of Kiawah Island Organizational Chart



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

**TOKI Committees**

**Public Safety Committee (PSC)**

PSC serves as a conduit for all public safety-related matters on the island, facilitating collaboration among all public safety entities.

**Planning Commission (PC)**

PC promotes the area’s physical and social well-being through continuous planning and development. It prepares and updates the comprehensive plan, recommends zoning and land development regulations, and develops capital improvement programs. The commission ensures all plans are based on thorough studies to benefit public health, safety, and welfare.

**Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA)**

BZA oversees administrative review, variances, and special zoning exceptions.

**Ways & Means Committee (WM)**

WM has oversight responsibility over budget and finance, revenue, audits, business licenses, accommodations tax, contracts, and procurement.

**Arts & Cultural Events Committee (ACE)**

ACE works to enhance community appreciation and involvement in the performing arts by providing a diversity of planned programs.

**Environmental Committee (EC)**

EC studies and supports environmental issues.

**Marsh Management Committee (MMC)**

MMC studies, manages, protects, and enhances Kiawah’s vital marsh habitat.

**Landscape and Tree Preservation Board (LTPB)**

LTPB works to preserve Kiawah’s natural environment for present and future generations, as outlined by a set of standards.

**Kiawah Island Stakeholders**

**Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA)**

Established in 1976, KICA is the primary property owners’ association for Kiawah Island, serving approximately 12,000 members. The association maintains common properties, operates key amenities, and provides essential services like security.

**Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR)**

KIGR is renowned for its five championship golf courses: The Ocean Course, Oak Point, Cougar Point, Osprey Point, and Turtle Point. The resort’s prestige is highlighted by its hosting of the PGA Championship in 2012 and 2021, with plans to host again in 2031. Notably, The Sanctuary and all five golf courses are certified as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries by Audubon International.

**Kiawah Island Conservancy (KIC)**

Kiawah Conservancy implements programs to encourage and assist landowners in the protection of the unique, natural environment of Kiawah Island.

**Kiawah Partners (KP)**

Kiawah Partners, was acquired by South Street Partners in 2013, the developer of Kiawah Island. KP manages Kiawah Island Real Estate and the Kiawah Island Club, which includes two private golf courses, tennis facilities, and dining venues. The company presently oversees the Kiawah Island Architectural Review Board, ensuring the island’s development maintains its natural beauty and high standards.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

**Kiawah Island’s Unique Governance Model**

The Town operates under a distinctive governance structure that sets it apart from traditional municipalities. This unique model combines municipal oversight with robust community management, creating a comprehensive approach to serving the island’s diverse population of residents and visitors and preserving its natural beauty.

Unlike most towns, Kiawah Island’s governance is shared between two primary entities: the Town of Kiawah Island (TOKI) and the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA). TOKI functions as a conventional municipal government, responsible for core public services and policy-making.

KICA, operates as the primary homeowners’ association, managing some aspects of daily community life that would typically fall under municipal purview in other towns. With a board of directors elected by community members, KICA maintains roads and bridges behind the gate, drainage systems (ponds), and common areas, as well as operating key amenities and providing security services.

This structure allows for specialized focus and expertise in both municipal affairs and community management. TOKI handles overarching governance issues, zoning, building services, beach management and public safety coordination, while KICA maintains infrastructure behind the gate, operates amenities, and provides essential services like security and landscape maintenance of KICA’s common areas.

The involvement of other key stakeholders, such as Kiawah Partners (KP) and Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR), further enriches this governance model. KP, as a developer, influences the island’s growth. While KIGR contributes significantly to tourism and

recreation, also maintaining high environmental standards.

This collaborative governance model enables Kiawah Island to maintain its high standards of living, preserve its natural environment, and address the unique needs of both full-time and part-time residents and visitors more effectively than a traditional municipal structure alone could achieve. It allows for more tailored services, community-driven decision-making, and a balanced approach to development and conservation.

The model also provides multiple avenues for resident involvement, from Town Council meetings to KICA committees, fostering a strong sense of community engagement. This multi-faceted approach to governance exemplifies a tailored solution to community management that balances public administration with private community oversight, resulting in a well-managed, environmentally conscious, and highly desirable place to live and visit.

**KICA Roles and Responsibilities**

KICA’s daily operations are overseen by key staff, including a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and a Director of Operations. These professionals collaborate closely with the Board to implement policies and manage association activities.

To support its governance, KICA employs various committees and task forces. These groups, composed of community members, board members, and staff, offer ongoing advice on specific areas and address particular projects as needed.

This governance structure actively involves KICA members in community decision-making, promoting transparency and engagement in the association’s management.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

**Kiawah Island Alliance**

To enhance strategic collaboration and cross-jurisdictional dialogue in support of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Kiawah Island will establish the Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA). This group, convened quarterly by the Mayor, will bring together key stakeholders and decision-makers from across Kiawah Island’s major organizations and interests.

The KIA will serve as a high-level forum for:

1. Facilitating long-term strategic discussions about Kiawah’s future
2. Identifying opportunities for policy alignment and collaboration
3. Addressing emerging issues that impact multiple stakeholders
4. Promoting open dialogue and understanding among diverse island entities

Composition of the KIA may include representatives from:

- Town Council
- Kiawah Island Community Association
- Kiawah Partners
- Kiawah Island Golf Resort
- Kiawah Conservancy
- Edens (Freshfields Village)
- County or state agency liaisons (as needed)

The KIA will operate as an advisory body, generating ideas and recommendations for consideration by the appropriate governing entities. It will not have decision-making

authority but will inform and support the work of established bodies such as the Town Council and Planning Commission.

To maintain focus on strategic matters:

- The Town will set clear, focused agendas for each meeting
- Discussions will be guided to prevent diversion into operational details
- Time will be allocated efficiently to cover key topics
- Follow-up on specific issues may be assigned to smaller working groups as needed

Summaries of KIA discussions and any resulting recommendations will be made public to ensure transparency. The KIA will complement existing governance structures and public engagement processes, providing a unique platform for collaborative, forward-thinking dialogue among Kiawah’s leaders.

While the KIA is the proposed approach for enhancing strategic collaboration, the Town remains open to refining this concept based on community feedback and practical experience.



**governance structure objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

**Enhance communication and engagement with full-time residents, part-time residents, and visitors.**

**Objective MP1**

Increase usage and effectiveness of existing communication channels.

**Strategy MP1.1**

- Conduct a user survey to understand preferences and barriers to using the Town’s mobile app.
- Develop a marketing campaign to promote the app’s features and benefits
- Optimize the weekly e-newsletters with more engaging content and design.

**Objective MP2**

Improve outreach to part-time residents and visitors.

**Strategy MP2.1**

- Create a “Virtual Welcome Package” with key information for new property owners and renters.
- Develop a targeted communication strategy for off-season updates to part-time residents.
- Partner with local businesses and rental agencies to distribute Town information to visitors.

**Objective MP3**

Enhance two-way communication between the Town and its constituents.

**Strategy MP3.1**

- Implement a regular feature on social media for resident input.
- Create a digital suggestion box on the Town website for ongoing community ideas.
- Host quarterly virtual town halls to accommodate both local and remote participants.

**GOAL:**

**Improve island-wide collaboration and strategic decision-making.**

**Objective MP4**

Establish and effectively operate the Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA).

**Strategy MP4.1**

- Convene quarterly KIA meetings with key stakeholders.
- Develop an annual agenda of strategic topics for KIA discussions, focusing on cross-jurisdictional issues and long-term planning for Kiawah Island.
- Create a system for summarizing KIA discussions and sharing key outcomes with the Town Council and the broader community.



## governance structure objectives and strategies

### Objective MP5

Streamline decision-making processes within the Town government.

#### Strategy MP5.1

- Conduct a comprehensive review of current decision-making procedures..
- Identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the process.
- Implement a streamlined approval process for routine matters, reserving full council review for more significant issues.

### Objective MP6

Enhance interdepartmental collaboration and communication.

#### Strategy MP6.1

- Implement a shared project management system across all Town departments.
- Establish regular cross-departmental meetings to discuss ongoing projects and potential collaborations.
- Develop a standardized reporting system to keep all departments informed of key initiatives and progress.



# 02



## populationnext

**Goal: Understand and Plan for Kiawah’s Diverse Population.**

**Population**  
*Considers historic trends and projections, household numbers and sizes, educational levels, and income characteristics.*

**Big Ideas**  
*Diverse Population Dynamics  
Regional Impact and Coordination*

**Objectives**  
*P1 - Continue to gather relevant data on Kiawah’s present and future population.  
P2 - Balance the needs of full-time residents, part-time residents, and visitors.  
P3 - Understand and integrate the impact of Johns Island’s growing population on Kiawah’s diverse community dynamics.*

### Overview

Kiawah Island, located off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina, boasts a unique population profile characterized by a blend of full-time residents, part-time homeowners, and visitors. This diverse mix creates a dynamic community that expands and contracts throughout the year, with notable fluctuations during peak tourism seasons and holidays. This distinctive demographic composition presents both challenges and opportunities for long-term planning.

The Population element of this Comprehensive Plan aims to shed light on Kiawah’s complex demographics, examining historical trends, current data, and future projections. By understanding the needs and impacts of all segments of its population, this plan seeks to guide Kiawah’s future development in a way that serves the entire community while preserving the island’s natural beauty and high quality of life.

POPULATION

**Population Growth on Kiawah and Johns Islands**

Since 2000, Kiawah Island’s full-time<sup>1</sup> resident population has grown from 1,163 to 2,066 in 2023, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.4%. This growth demonstrates Kiawah’s appeal as a permanent residence. Notably, the population increase observed between 2019 and 2020 could plausibly be attributed, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many people sought out less densely populated areas with natural amenities during this time.

Kiawah’s population dynamics are complex, with approximately 7100 part-time<sup>2</sup> residents owning second homes or vacation properties. These seasonal residents significantly impact the island’s character and economy, especially during peak seasons.

This blend of full-time and part-time residents

underscores Kiawah’s attractiveness as both a permanent and second-home community, presenting unique challenges for long-term planning and resource allocation.

Nearby Johns Island, has experienced even more rapid growth. Its population increased from 8,607 in 2000 to 24,874 in 2023, a CAGR of 4.72%. This growth highlights Johns Island’s expanding residential appeal.

The combined growth patterns of Kiawah Island and Johns Island emphasize the need for coordinated regional planning to manage development sustainably while preserving the area’s unique character and quality of life.

**Population Growth, Kiawah Island, 2000 - 2023**

Source: US Census



<sup>1</sup> Full-time residents:

Individuals who meet at least two of the following criteria:

- a) Registered to vote in South Carolina and Municipal Elections with Kiawah Island as their address
- b) Claim Kiawah Island as their primary residence for tax purposes
- c) Spend more than 183 days per year on Kiawah Island
- d) Hold a South Carolina driver’s license with a Kiawah Island address

<sup>2</sup> Part-time residents:

Property owners on Kiawah Island who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- a) Spend less than 183 days per year on Kiawah Island
- b) Have a primary residence elsewhere for tax purposes
- c) Are not registered to vote in South Carolina and Municipal Elections

**Kiawah’s Population Profile**

Kiawah Island is experiencing a demographic shift that will influence long-range planning. As a premier retirement destination, the island is seeing its full-time resident population aging in place. The median age has risen from 63.5 years in 2010 to 68.3 years in 2023 and is expected to surpass 70 within the next five years. Individuals aged 65 to 74 now comprise 44.3% of the total full-time population.

This aging trend among full-time residents underscores the need for age-friendly infrastructure and services, including healthcare facilities, and tailored recreational and cultural amenities. The Town should explore initiatives that enhance the quality of life for older adults, such as implementing shared transit options to improve mobility around the island. At the same time, the Kiawah Island Community Association should continue improving accessibility within the community to support residents as they age in place.

Kiawah Island exhibits a unique multigenerational dynamic that significantly influences its character and planning needs. While the full-time resident population tends to be older, the island’s appeal as a premier vacation destination attracts visitors from various age groups, creating a vibrant, multigenerational community throughout the year.

This diverse visitor<sup>3</sup> profile includes:

- Families with young children seeking beach vacations
- Young professionals looking for luxury getaways
- Middle-aged couples on golf retreats

<sup>3</sup> Visitors:

Individuals staying on Kiawah Island for a limited time (e.g., less than 30 consecutive days) who do not own property on the island. This category includes short-term renters and guests of residents.

- Retirees exploring potential retirement locations
- Multigenerational family groups gathering for reunions or holidays

The interplay between the older resident population and the diverse age range of visitors creates a dynamic environment that requires flexible and inclusive planning. This dynamic may lead to increased demand for amenities and services that cater to a broader range of needs and preferences.

To address these varied demographics, Kiawah Island benefits from versatile community spaces that serve multiple purposes. Freshfields Village and the future Andell West are examples of developments that foster a vibrant community atmosphere and encourage intergenerational interaction. These areas combine residential, commercial, and recreational elements that cater to diverse needs. Coordinating with the rapidly growing Johns Island is crucial for integrated regional planning and ensuring access to essential services. This collaborative approach helps create a well-rounded community serving both residents and visitors of all ages.

In essence, Kiawah Island’s approach to land use planning should aim to create a balanced, dynamic, and vibrant community that addresses the needs of its aging full-time population, and the diverse part-time and visitor demographics. Strategic planning should prioritize age-friendly infrastructure, world-class amenities, enhanced connectivity, and regional collaboration to support the well-being and quality of life for all who enjoy Kiawah Island, now and in the future.

POPULATION

***Kiawah’s Household and Regional Impacts***

Kiawah Island’s residential landscape has experienced moderate growth over the past decade. According to the U.S. Census the number of households on the island increased from 869 in 2010 to 1,133 in 2023, representing a modest annual growth rate of about 2.1%. One and Two-person households overwhelmingly dominate Kiawah’s residential, accounting for 90% of all households. This pattern strongly aligns with the island’s appeal to retirees and empty nesters.

These figures represent only full-time resident households. Kiawah’s housing is also influenced by part-time property owners, who make up a notable portion of the island’s property owners. This mix of full-time and part-time residents creates a dynamic housing market with implications for community services, infrastructure usage, and economic patterns. During peak seasons, the island experiences a significant population influx, temporarily altering its household composition and service demands.

Johns Island’s rapid expansion starkly contrasts Kiawah’s more modest growth. Between 2010 and 2023, the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) shows Johns Island added 4,372 households, growing at an annual rate of 4.3%. This substantial increase significantly impacts Kiawah, putting pressure on shared resources, including the single access road, beaches, resort amenities, and Freshfields Village.

Kiawah’s residential composition continues to evolve, notably with the Fall 2025 opening of Seafields. This development, the area’s first 62+ Life Plan community, will offer a total of 106 units, including 90 independent living units

and 16 assisted living units. Seafields and the upcoming MUSC healthcare facility are located off the island but still within the Town of Kiawah Island, adding new dimensions to the area’s service needs.

These developments, both on and off the island, are critical to Kiawah’s future planning. Given Kiawah’s unique geography as a barrier island with limited access, the Town needs to carefully manage its existing infrastructure and services to handle fluctuating demands. This includes strategic planning for traffic management on the single access road, especially during peak seasons and events.

For off-island areas within the Town limits, coordinated planning is essential to ensure that services and amenities can effectively serve both year-round residents and seasonal visitors while minimizing impact on the island’s limited access points. Moreover, sustainable management of these changes requires stronger regional coordination.

By adapting to these dynamics, Kiawah can evolve mindfully, maintaining its unique appeal while meeting the diverse needs of current and future residents.

POPULATION

***Household Income Comparison\****

Understanding the economic context of a community within its region is an important aspect of comprehensive planning. The following data is based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 5-year estimates, providing the most current official information available:

**Median Household Income:**

- Kiawah Island: \$214,250
- Johns Island: \$103,902
- Charleston County: \$80,401
- Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA): \$77,460

These figures offer a snapshot of the economic landscape across the region. Kiawah Island’s median household income is higher than that of the surrounding areas, reflecting its unique position within the local economy.

Additional economic indicators for Kiawah Island include:

Per Capita Income: \$197,853

Median Home Value: \$1,423,900

For context, Charleston County has a per capita income of \$52,484 and Johns Islands CCD has a per capita income of \$50,833.

While income is just one aspect of a community’s economic profile, this comparison provides valuable insight into Kiawah Island’s economic standing within the broader Charleston area.

\*Any Kiawah information, is only reporting for full-time residents only.

***Kiawah’s Population and Visitor Trends***

Kiawah Island presents a unique demographic landscape characterized by a blend of full-time residents, part-time homeowners, and seasonal visitors. This diverse population mix creates a dynamic community that expands and contracts throughout the year, with notable fluctuations during peak tourism seasons and holidays.

Over the past two decades, the island’s full-time resident population has shown some growth. ESRI Business Analyst\* projects this segment to increase from 2,013 in 2020 to approximately 2,343 by 2040, reflecting a 16.4% growth over the 20-year period.

While full-time residents form the core of the year-round community, part-time residents significantly shape Kiawah’s character. Approximately 7,100 part-time residents own second

POPULATION

homes or vacation properties on the island, substantially outnumbering the full-time population. This ratio underscores Kiawah’s dual identity as both a permanent community and a sought-after vacation destination.

A notable aging trend is evident among full-time residents. By 2040, residents aged 65 to 84 are expected to comprise over 75% of the full-time population. This demographic shift suggests a need for age-appropriate infrastructure and services in future planning.

The impact of visitors is substantial, as evidenced by traffic data. The 2023 KICA Annual Security Report recorded over 2.2 million vehicle entries through the Main Gate, including passes for day visitors, renters, and special events. Recent data shows an upward trend in vehicle traffic, with projections suggesting continued growth of 5-10% above 2023 levels, subject to seasonal fluctuations.

The growth of neighboring communities, particularly Johns Island, adds another layer to Kiawah’s planning considerations. As these areas develop, they may influence traffic patterns, service demands, and overall regional dynamics.

Kiawah’s unique composition of aging full-time residents, a large part-time resident population, and substantial visitor influx presents both challenges and opportunities for future planning. Balancing the needs of these diverse groups requires careful consideration in areas such as transportation, healthcare, and recreational facilities.

As Kiawah plans for the future, these population dynamics will shape long-term strategies. The Town’s comprehensive planning efforts must address the needs of its diverse population to support a sustainable and inclusive community while maintaining Kiawah Island’s appeal and natural beauty.

\* ESRI Business Analyst is a collection of tools, data, and wizards that use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to help make decisions.



**population**  
**objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

**Understand and plan for Kiawah’s diverse population.**

**Objective MP1**

Continue to gather relevant data on Kiawah’s present and future population.

**Strategy MP1.1**

- Conduct regular demographic studies to track changes in full-time resident population, part-time resident population, and visitor trends.
- Analyze vehicle traffic data and pass issuance patterns to better understand seasonal population fluctuations
- Collaborate with KICA to gather comprehensive data on community usage and needs.

**Objective MP2**

Address the needs of full-time residents, part-time residents, and visitors.

**Strategy MP2.1**

- Conduct regular surveys and community engagement sessions to identify the specific needs and preferences of full-time residents, part-time residents, and visitors.
- Implement a communication strategy that effectively reaches all population groups, including digital platforms for part-time residents and visitors, and local channels for full-time residents
- Plan for flexible-use spaces and

facilities that can adapt to changing demands throughout the year, accommodating both peak season influxes and off-season community needs.

**Objective MP3**

Understand and integrate the impact of Johns Island’s growing population on Kiawah’s diverse community dynamics.

**Strategy MP3.1**

- Conduct regular studies to understand how Johns Island’s rapid growth affects Kiawah’s population composition, including impacts on part-time residency and visitor patterns.
- Collaborate with Johns Island Task Force and other Johns Island Organizations to gather data on commercial and residential development that may influence Kiawah’s population trends or service needs.
- Develop forecasts for shared resource usage, such as roads, beaches, and commercial areas, considering both Kiawah’s diverse population and Johns Island’s growing community.

# 03





# economic developmentnext

**Goal: To understand and support the ongoing needs for the success and prosperity of all Kiawah stakeholders.**

## Economic Development

Considers labor force and labor force characteristics, employment by place of work and residence, and analysis of the economic base.

## Big Ideas

Sustainable Tourism Development  
Environmental Conservation and Economic Growth Balance

## Objectives

- ED1 - Safeguard Kiawah's economic viability across changing conditions
- ED2 - Support the Island's tourism, commercial business, and other employer needs.
- ED3 - Balance economic development with Living with Nature principles.

## Overview

Kiawah Island's economy is primarily driven by tourism and service industries, supported by its natural environment, wildlife, beaches, and resort amenities. These sectors generate significant revenue and employment opportunities, though job trends fluctuate seasonally.

The island's appeal as a vacation destination attracts visitors who contribute to local businesses and regional revenue. Many visitors become full or part-time residents, further enhancing the local economy.

This chapter examines Kiawah's economic vitality, analyzing trends in tourism taxes and employment growth. It highlights the island's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship, ensuring economic development aligns with natural resource preservation. This approach maintains Kiawah's character while enhancing quality of life for residents and visitors, and secures its long-term appeal as a premier destination.

## Job Density and Employer Overview

Based on 2023 estimates, Kiawah has nearly 6,500 jobs. Almost half are in the Accommodations and Food Services sector, driven by the resort economy. Retail Trade represents another 25% of all jobs.

The Kiawah Island Golf Resort and Kiawah Island Club are the two major employment concentrations. The Golf Resort, with an estimated 1,700 employees, is the island's largest employer and the eighth largest private employer in the Charleston region.

Jobs in Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade typically have wages below the regional average.

## Town of Kiawah Island's Revenue Structure and Expenditures

The Town's revenue is composed of both restricted and unrestricted funds, each playing a crucial role in the Town's financial landscape. The total budgeted revenue for FY ending in 2024 is \$15.5 million, with restricted funds making up 43% and unrestricted funds accounting for 57%.

### Restricted Funds (43% of total revenue, \$6.7M)

These funds have limited discretion for adjustment and must be used for specific purposes, primarily related to tourism promotion and support:

1. State Accommodation Tax (SATAX) (43% of restricted funds, \$2.9M): Tourists on Kiawah Island pay an accommodation tax. Most of this revenue must be used for tourism-related expenses, except for \$25,000 plus 5% of the remaining total,

which goes to the Town's unrestricted general fund. The SATAX Committee recommends how to allocate these funds, subject to Town Council approval.

2. Local Accommodation Tax (25% of restricted funds, \$1.7M): The Town imposes a 1% local accommodation tax, collected monthly by Charleston County. These funds are restricted to tourism-related expenses, including cultural events and maintaining public beach access roads.
3. County Accommodation Tax (10% of restricted funds, \$700K): Charleston County collects a 2% accommodation tax, returning about 25% to Kiawah Island. This revenue must fund tourism-related capital projects or services.
4. Hospitality Tax (15% of restricted funds, \$1M): A 1% hospitality tax is applied to prepared food and beverages, collected monthly from restaurants and similar establishments.
5. Other restricted funds (7% of restricted funds, \$450K).

### Usage of Restricted Funds:

In 2024, these funds support tourism-related activities and expenditures, including beach patrol, public safety initiatives, wildlife programs, community resources, emergency services training, marketing and regional tourism promotion.

### Unrestricted Funds: General Fund Revenues (57% of total revenue, \$8.8M)

These funds provide greater flexibility in their use:

1. Business License Fees (43% of unrestricted

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- funds, \$3.8M)
- 2. Building Permits (15% of unrestricted funds, \$1.3M)
- 3. Solid Waste Fees (12% of unrestricted funds, \$1.1M)
- 4. Franchise Fees (11% of unrestricted funds, \$1M)
- 5. Local Option Tax (10% of unrestricted funds, \$900K)
- 6. Other unrestricted funds (9% of unrestricted funds, \$800K): Including court fines, investment income, and miscellaneous sources.

Source: Town of Kiawah Island, Budget-At-A-Glance FY25 Budget

**No Municipal Property Tax**

The Town currently does not impose a property tax. All property taxes paid by residents go directly to Charleston County. If the Town were to need additional revenue, there is a mechanism in place that would require Kiawah residents' support.

**Kiawah's Property Tax Impact**

None of this revenue comes directly to the Town of Kiawah Island's budget. Instead, Kiawah's property taxes have a substantial impact on the regional economy:

- Kiawah property tax revenue generates over \$96 million in property tax revenues for Charleston County:
  - Sixty-Five (65%) percent funds the Charleston County's School District Budget.
  - Twenty (20%) percent funds the Charleston County Administration budget.
  - Twelve (12%) percent funds the St. Johns Fire District budget

- Three (3%) percent funds the Charleston County Parks and Recreation, and Trident Technical College

This situation underscores the importance of the Town's revenue sources and its role in the broader regional economy.

Source: Charleston County Treasurers office, Information based on FY23 Collection Information.

**Key Financial Trends and Considerations:**

1. **Tourism Recovery:** Tourism-related taxes showed moderate growth from 2014 to 2019, experienced a decline during the 2020 pandemic, and then rebounded strongly in 2021-2023. For instance, State accommodation tax revenue increased from a pandemic low of \$1.3 million in 2020 to \$3 million by 2023, indicating a shift towards a more consistent year-round tourism economy.
2. **Business License Growth:** Business license fees have shown steady growth since 2014, rising from \$1.9 million to \$3.9 million in 2022, with only a slight 1.5% decline in 2023.
3. **Development Dynamics:** As the island approaches full development, revenue from new construction permits may decline. However, this could be offset by an increase in renovation permits for older structures
4. **No Property Tax:** It's notable that the Town of Kiawah Island does not collect any property tax. Property taxes paid by residents go directly to Charleston County.

The mix of restricted and unrestricted funds allows Kiawah to support both tourism-related initiatives and essential Town services. As the island's development landscape evolves, the Town will need to strategically plan for potential shifts in these revenue streams to ensure long-term fiscal stability.

Source: Town of Kiawah Island Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports, 2015-2023.

**Economic Impact of Tourism on Kiawah's Economy**

Tourism plays a pivotal role in Kiawah Island's economic development, extending far beyond just tax revenues. Its impact is multifaceted and significant:

1. **Job Creation:** The tourism industry is a major employer on Kiawah Island.
2. **Business Stimulation:** Tourism supports a vibrant retail sector, which represents about a quarter of all jobs on Kiawah. This includes shops, restaurants, and various service providers that cater to both visitors and residents.
3. **Property Values:** The desirability of Kiawah as a vacation destination helps maintain and potentially increase property values, benefiting homeowners and the local real estate market.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** Tourism revenues help fund infrastructure improvements that benefit both visitors and residents, such as beach maintenance, road improvements, and public facilities.
5. **Seasonal Economic Patterns:** While tourism provides significant economic benefits, it's important to note that many jobs in the Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade sectors typically have wages below the regional average. Additionally, employment trends often fluctuate based on seasonal demand.
6. **Economic Benefits:** Tourism has a multiplier effect on the local economy. Visitors' spending circulates through the economy, supporting indirect jobs and businesses in sectors not directly related to tourism.

7. **Regional Impact:** Kiawah's tourism industry doesn't just benefit the island; it contributes significantly to the broader regional economy. For instance, Kiawah generates over \$96 million in property tax revenues for Charleston County.
8. **Year-Round Economy Shift:** Recent trends suggest a move towards a more consistent, year-round tourism economy rather than a peak season-focused one. This could lead to more stable employment and business opportunities throughout the year.

By understanding these economic impacts, the Town can better strategize its economic development efforts, balancing the needs of the tourism industry with those of permanent residents and other sectors of the economy. This balance is crucial for maintaining Kiawah's unique character while ensuring its long-term economic sustainability.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Tourism Impact on Kiawah Island (1999-present)**

Over the past two decades, tourism has played an vital role in Kiawah Island’s economy and development. Since 1999, the island has seen a transformation in its tourism landscape, evolving from a primarily domestic, seasonal destination to a year-round, internationally recognized luxury resort area.

In the 2000s, Kiawah began to gain more national recognition, with its pristine beaches and world-class golf courses attracting a growing number of visitors.

The hosting of major golf tournaments, including the 2012 and 2021 PGA Championships at the Ocean Course, significantly boosted Kiawah’s profile as a premier golf destination. These events not only brought immediate economic benefits but also enhanced the island’s long-term appeal to high-end travelers.

The opening of The Sanctuary, a five-star oceanfront hotel, in 2004 marked a pivotal moment in Kiawah’s tourism development. This luxury property elevated the island’s accommodation offerings and helped attract a more affluent clientele. Consequently, the average visitor spend per trip has steadily increased, reaching \$1,062 by 2022, up from \$878 in 2019.

Kiawah’s tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Following the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the island’s tourism sector rebounded more quickly than many other destinations. This resilience is particularly evident in the vacation rental market, which has become a crucial component of Kiawah’s accommodation mix.

From 2018 to 2023, vacation rentals on Kiawah Island demonstrated fluctuating occupancy rates and overall growth in average daily rates

(ADR). The data shows the following trends:

- 2018: 52.8% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$395
- 2019: 53.9% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$366
- 2020: 66.9% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$377
- 2021: 77.7% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$447
- 2022: 66.1% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$485
- 2023: 60.6% occupancy rate with an ADR of \$461

Despite an initial decline in ADR from 2018 to 2019, the market rebounded quickly following the pandemic. Occupancy rates surged from 53.9% in 2019 to a peak of 77.7% in 2021, while ADR increased steadily from \$366 in 2019 to a high of \$485 in 2022. Although 2023 shows a slight moderation in both occupancy (60.6%) and ADR (\$461), these figures remain significantly above pre-pandemic levels, demonstrating the continued strength and appeal of Kiawah’s vacation rental market.

Charleston International Airport’s growth and development enhance Kiawah Island’s accessibility for domestic and international visitors. The airport’s expanding services and routes have improved connectivity to Kiawah, contributing to a diverse tourist base. Ongoing improvements in airport facilities, flight options, and passenger experiences benefit Kiawah’s tourism industry by easing travel to the island and potentially extending its marketing reach to new markets.

The economic impact of tourism on Kiawah Island has been substantial. As part of the greater Charleston area, Kiawah has contributed to and benefited from the region’s tourism growth. The overall economic impact of tourism in the Charleston area, including Kiawah, grew from approximately \$7.4 billion in 2018 to an

impressive \$13.1 billion by 2023. This growth has supported job creation, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced amenities that benefit both visitors and residents.

However, this growth has not been without challenges. Kiawah has had to balance tourism development with environmental conservation, maintaining the natural beauty that attracts visitors in the first place. The island has implemented various environmental programs and regulations to protect its ecosystems while accommodating tourism growth.

Looking ahead, Kiawah Island is focusing on sustainable tourism practices, aiming to maximize economic benefits while minimizing environmental impact.

In conclusion, tourism has been a transformative force for Kiawah Island over the past two decades. It has driven economic growth, enhanced the island’s global reputation, and contributed to infrastructure and service improvements. The strong performance of the vacation rental market, particularly its resilience during and after the pandemic, underscores Kiawah’s appeal as a high-end destination. As Kiawah continues to evolve, the challenge will be to maintain its exclusive appeal while adapting to changing travel trends and addressing the needs of both visitors and residents.

*Source: Charleston Visitors Bureau, Municipal Quarterly Reports, (1999 - Spring 2024)*



**economic development objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

*To develop and implement strategies that foster the success and prosperity of all Kiawah stakeholders through sustainable economic growth and community-wide support.*

jurisdictional issues and enhance transparency in decision-making.

**Objective ED1**

Safeguard Kiawah’s economic viability across changing conditions.

**Strategy ED1.1**

Implement a monitoring system for economic indicators.

- Regularly assess and report on key economic metrics to anticipate and respond to changing conditions.

**Strategy ED1.2**

Evaluate and optimize revenue streams within current operational structures.

**Objective ED2**

Support the Island’s tourism, commercial business, and other employer needs.

**Strategy ED2.1**

- Coordinate with the proposed Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA) and other relevant groups on economic strategy issues.
- Collect and share population, demographic, and commercial development updates from KIA members and other major stakeholders.
- Foster collaboration on cross-

**Objective ED3**

Balance economic development with Living with Nature principles.

**Strategy ED3.1**

Develop a sustainable tourism plan.

- Create a long-term plan that outlines how to optimize economic benefits from tourism while minimizing disruption to residents and the environment.



# 04



## natural resourcesnext

*Conserve Kiawah’s greatest natural assets and habitat.*

### *Natural Resources*

*Considers coastal resources, slope characteristics, prime agricultural and forest land, plant and animal habitats, parks and recreation areas, scenic views and sites, wetlands, and soil types.*

### *Big Ideas*

*Live With Nature  
Marsh Management Plan*

### *Objectives*

- Champion the Live with Nature approach*
- Develop tools to encourage environmental stewardship*
- Maintain and expand public environmental education and outreach programs*

### *Overview*

Kiawah Island is a sanctuary where nature seamlessly blends with conservation initiatives. Spanning over 4,500 acres of vibrant tidal salt marsh, 10 miles of pristine beachfront, 365 acres of tranquil water surfaces, lush shrub thickets, and expansive maritime forests, Kiawah is a living testament to our dedication to preserving this extraordinary environment. With 345 acres of conserved barrier island habitat, we underscore our unwavering commitment to sustainability.

Our guiding principle, Live with Nature, embodies a bold vision where human presence harmonizes seamlessly with Kiawah’s dynamic ecosystems. This philosophy ensures that our landscapes remain resilient and thriving, even in the face of climate change.

## Comprehensive Conservation Strategies and Community Engagement

Kiawah Island’s conservation strategies are truly groundbreaking. We employ innovative measures such as:

- **Marsh Management:** Utilizing state-of-the-art techniques to monitor and preserve our expansive salt marshes, which are critical in protecting against storm surges and providing habitat for diverse species
- **Proactive Beach Restoration:** Implementing sophisticated erosion control and dune restoration projects to safeguard our 10 miles of beachfront, ensuring it remains a natural barrier against rising sea levels and extreme weather.
- **Wildlife Tracking and Research:** GPS technology and banding programs are used to monitor the health and movement of local species, including bobcats, alligators and sea turtles, to better understand and protect their habitats.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Encouraging the use of native plants in landscaping to reduce water consumption and support local wildlife, as well as promoting sustainable building practices that minimize environmental impact.
- **Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation:** Comprehensive studies are conducted to address the challenges posed by rising sea levels and increased flooding. These studies inform our proactive measures to protect the island’s infrastructure and natural habitats.

Public engagement is at the heart of our conservation mission. The Town of Kiawah Island offers numerous ways to connect deeply with our natural heritage. Visit the Nature Center at

Night Heron Park to learn about our local wildlife. Participate in our Turtle Patrol to help protect sea turtle nests, join the Shorebird Stewardship program to safeguard critical bird habitats, and become part of the Bobcat Guardian Program to monitor and support our bobcat population. Additionally, witness the unique dolphin strand feeding phenomenon.

Our virtual resources and interactive initiatives ensure that everyone stays informed and involved, fostering a profound connection with Kiawah Island’s unique ecosystem.

### Live With Nature

Kiawah Island has always embraced the delicate balance between development and preserving natural landscapes, a commitment dating back to the community’s inception in 1974. This balance is achieved through carefully integrating built and natural environments, allowing people to engage with nature while ensuring habitat health.

The Town’s new landscape and tree ordinance further strengthens this commitment by establishing comprehensive tree preservation and landscaping standards. These standards aim to consistently preserve and enhance Kiawah’s natural environment and protect significant trees and forests for present and future generations. The ordinance introduces regulations for tree removal, protection, and mitigation, with special emphasis on specimen trees and grand trees.

It also establishes a Landscape and Tree Preservation Board to review and approve tree preservation plans for new developments and handle special circumstances regarding tree removal. The new standards encourage the use of native species in landscaping, promoting local biodiversity and supporting the island’s ecosystem. By implementing these measures, Kiawah Island continues to ensure that its built environment coexists harmoniously with the island’s wildlife and natural beauty, maintaining its unique character and ecological integrity.

### Grow Native Plant Database

Kiawah Island is dedicated to educating property owners about the island’s natural resources. The Grow Native Plant Database is an invaluable tool for residents and property owners, offering detailed information on native plant species that foster a healthy and sustainable habitat unique to Kiawah Island. This resource provides guidelines on selecting native plants that enhance biodiversity and support local wildlife.

Additionally, the Kiawah Conservancy contributes to the database by offering practical advice on sustainable landscaping practices. They provide resources on creating rain gardens, which are designed to capture and filter stormwater runoff, promoting water conservation and reducing erosion. These gardens help maintain the island’s natural beauty and ecological balance.

For more information, visit [kiawahisland.org](http://kiawahisland.org), where you can explore the wealth of knowledge shared about Kiawah Island’s wildlife, including where to observe specific species, their traits, and feeding habits. This comprehensive resource helps residents and visitors alike connect deeply with the island’s natural beauty.

### Animal Species

The species of Kiawah Island play a critical role to the health of the fragile ecosystems that are cherished by residents and visitors alike. To protect these habitats, Town Biologists must consistently understand and monitor the species on the island.

#### Bird Research

Kiawah’s Bird Research program is a comprehensive initiative aimed at understanding and protecting the island’s diverse avian

population. Town Biologists conduct various projects, with bird banding serving as a primary research tool. This technique involves capturing birds and attaching unique identifiers, providing crucial insights into the health, demographics, and movements of different species.

Key components of the program include:

1. Fall Migration Monitoring: Daily banding from August 15 to November 30 at two locations to study songbirds during their migration
2. Winter Banding: Conducted from December through March, focusing on wintering songbird populations, especially Yellow-rumped Warblers.
3. Painted Bunting Banding: A summer project studying the movements, distribution, and population trends of these colorful birds.
4. Marsh Sparrow Banding: Winter project focusing on three species of coastal sparrows, addressing conservation concerns related to habitat loss and sea-level rise
5. Wilson’s Plover Banding: Tracks movements and nesting success of this beach-nesting species.
6. MOTUS Bird Tracking: Two stations on Kiawah Island are part of a larger network that uses radio telemetry to track tagged birds, providing data on migratory routes and movements.

These research efforts contribute valuable data to local and national bird conservation initiatives, helping to protect Kiawah’s avian biodiversity.

NATURAL RESOURCES

**White-tailed Deer**

Surveys of white-tailed deer population density on Kiawah Island have been conducted twice yearly since 1997. With the decline of natural predators like bobcats, maintaining the deer population at a target level of 60-80 deer per square mile has become crucial. To address this, a deer harvest program was initiated in 2021. This measure is essential for preventing the disruption of Kiawah Island's vital habitats that can occur when deer populations exceed sustainable levels.



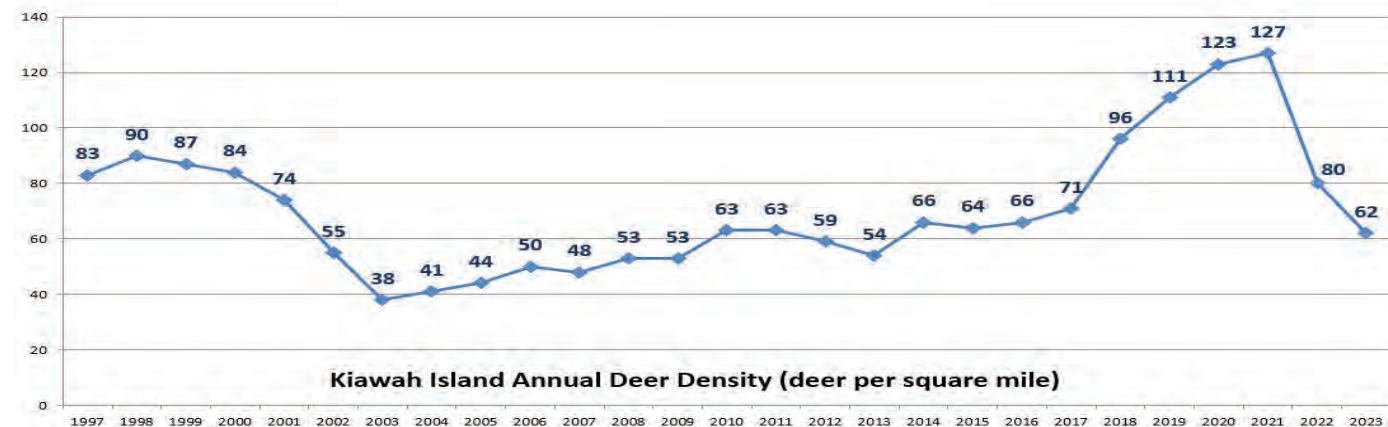
Source: "Wildlife Surveys and Monitoring", Town of Kiawah Island

**Bobcats**

The Kiawah Bobcat GPS Project is a continuous tracking effort started in 2007 by the Town of Kiawah Island and Kiawah Conservancy. Five juvenile bobcats have GPS collars on them for the 2024 trapping season. This information is used to protect key habitat areas that bobcats are pinpointed in, which specifically include Captain Sam's Spit and the eastern portion of Cougar Island, as well as generally scrub-shrub, forest, and developed areas for hunting



A Bobcat sheltered on Kiawah Island



Source: "Wildlife Surveys and Monitoring", Town of Kiawah Island

and scrub-shrub and dunes for resting. There has been a recent decline of bobcats since 2017 due to second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides poisoning. Public awareness efforts have been made to stop the use of this deadly rodenticide.

**American Alligators**

Kiawah Island is home to a thriving population of American Alligators, with estimates suggesting nearly 700 animals inhabiting the island. This significant alligator presence coexists with the island's 1,400 permanent residents and over 20,000 annual visitors, creating a unique environment where human-alligator interactions are commonplace.

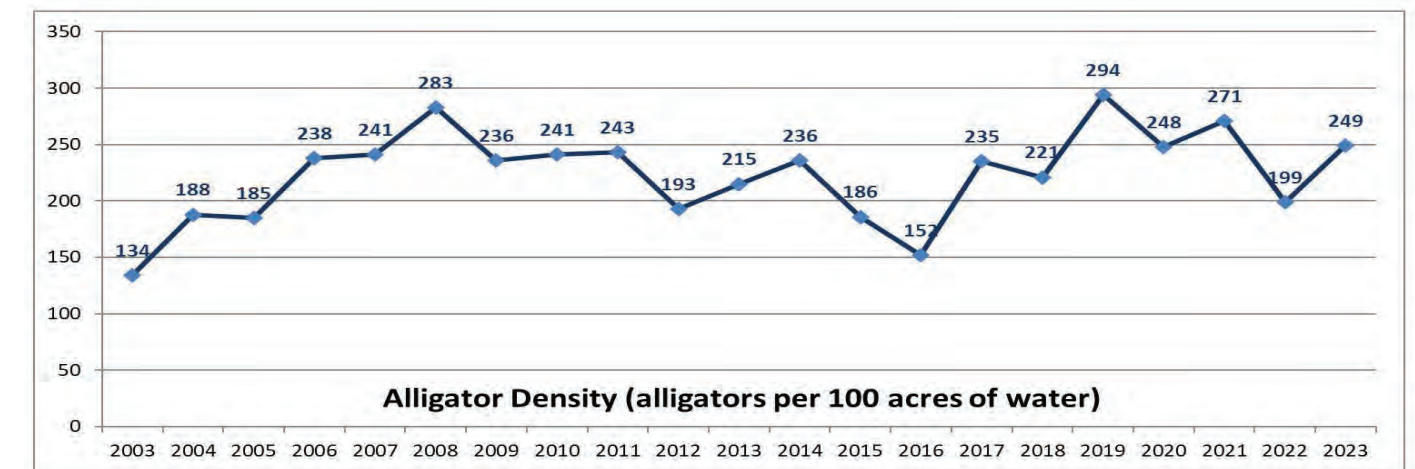
Recognizing the importance of maintaining a safe coexistence, the Town of Kiawah Island (TOKI) and the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) have implemented a comprehensive research program. This initiative aims to better understand alligator behavior and movements, thereby enhancing awareness

and safety across the island.

A key component of this program is the annual survey of alligators across most of the island's ponds. These surveys provide crucial data on population density and distribution, helping officials make informed decisions about alligator management.

The research not only contributes to local safety measures but also adds valuable information to the broader understanding of alligator ecology in human-populated areas. By closely monitoring the alligator population and studying their patterns, Kiawah Island continues to set an example for responsible wildlife management in residential communities.

Through these efforts, TOKI and KICA strive to ensure that the interaction between people and alligators remains as safe as possible, preserving the island's unique ecological balance while protecting residents and visitors alike.



Source: "Wildlife Surveys and Monitoring", Town of Kiawah Island

NATURAL RESOURCES

**Turtle Patrol Program**

Kiawah Island is home to an extensive Loggerhead habitat. With over 10 miles of beach front, Kiawah Island serves as a vital nesting ground for the turtles. These turtles are endangered, and the nesting process is an especially vulnerable time for them. Each spring, turtles emerge from the Atlantic Ocean to nest.

Kiawah’s Turtle Patrol, one of the largest turtle patrol volunteer programs in the United States, has monitored these nests since 1973. The group of resident and non-resident volunteers has been supported by the Town of Kiawah Island since 1990.

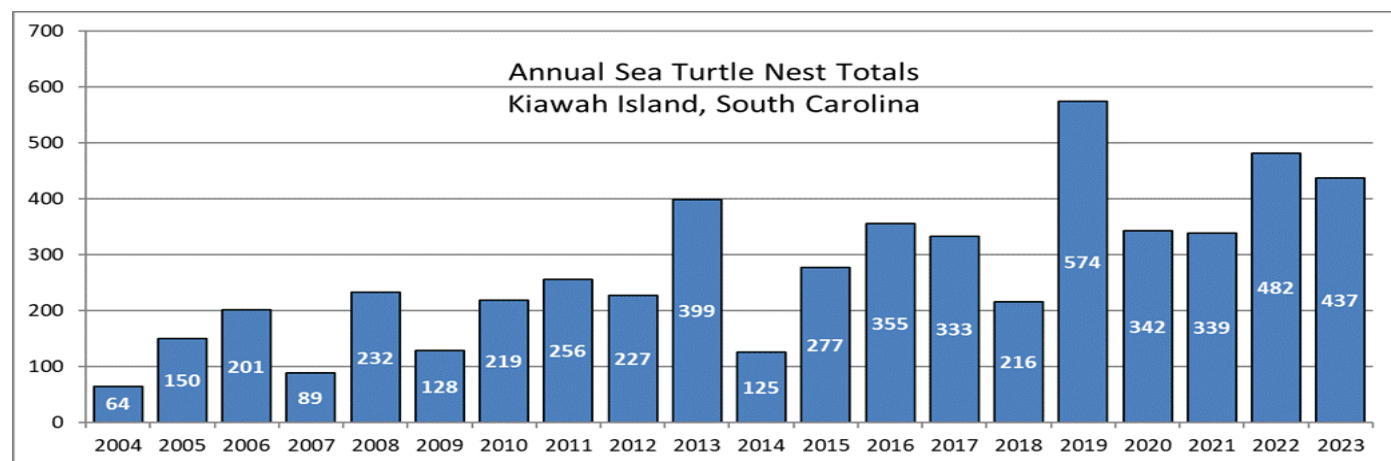
Historically, Kiawah’s beaches have been home to 20 to 25 nests per mile. This rate is among the highest in the state for developed beaches. The highest recorded total for nests was in 2019, when 574 nests were identified.

Low-lying nests are relocated to protect against tidal washover. Volunteers patrol the beach daily during hatching season, monitoring hatchling emergence. Post-hatching, nests are excavated and inventoried. Detailed records of all activities are reported annually to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Resources.

**Shorebird Stewardship Program**

The Kiawah Island Shorebird Stewardship Program, established in 2017, is a crucial initiative aimed at protecting and conserving the island’s diverse shorebird population. This program addresses the critical need to minimize disturbance to shorebirds during feeding, resting, and nesting periods along Kiawah’s beach, which serves as an essential habitat for thousands of resident and migratory shorebirds. The program focuses on outreach and education, training volunteer stewards to engage with beachgoers and share information about shorebirds and their habitat needs.

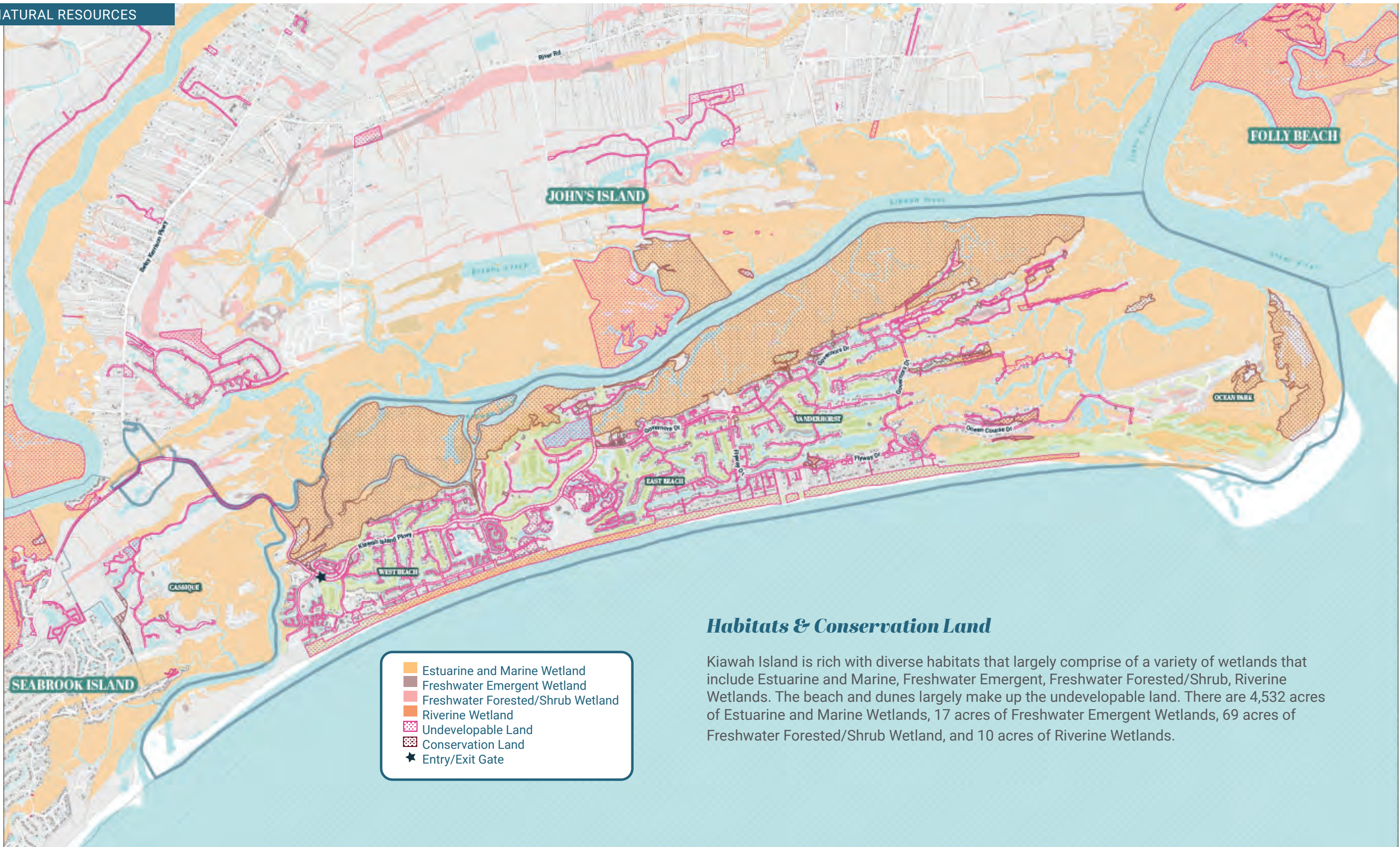
The program operates year-round, with seasonal focuses on Red Knots (March - May), nesting shorebirds (April - July), and fall and winter migrants (September - February). It aims to combat the 70% decline in shorebird populations since the 1970s by promoting shorebird-friendly behaviors among beachgoers and dog owners. Strategies include regular beach patrols, educational interactions, monitoring of critical shorebird areas, and promotion of practices such as leashing dogs and avoiding dune areas.



Source: "Loggerhead Sea Turtles", Town of Kiawah Island



NATURAL RESOURCES



**Habitats & Conservation Land**

Kiawah Island is rich with diverse habitats that largely comprise of a variety of wetlands that include Estuarine and Marine, Freshwater Emergent, Freshwater Forested/Shrub, Riverine Wetlands. The beach and dunes largely make up the undevelopable land. There are 4,532 acres of Estuarine and Marine Wetlands, 17 acres of Freshwater Emergent Wetlands, 69 acres of Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland, and 10 acres of Riverine Wetlands.

NATURAL RESOURCES



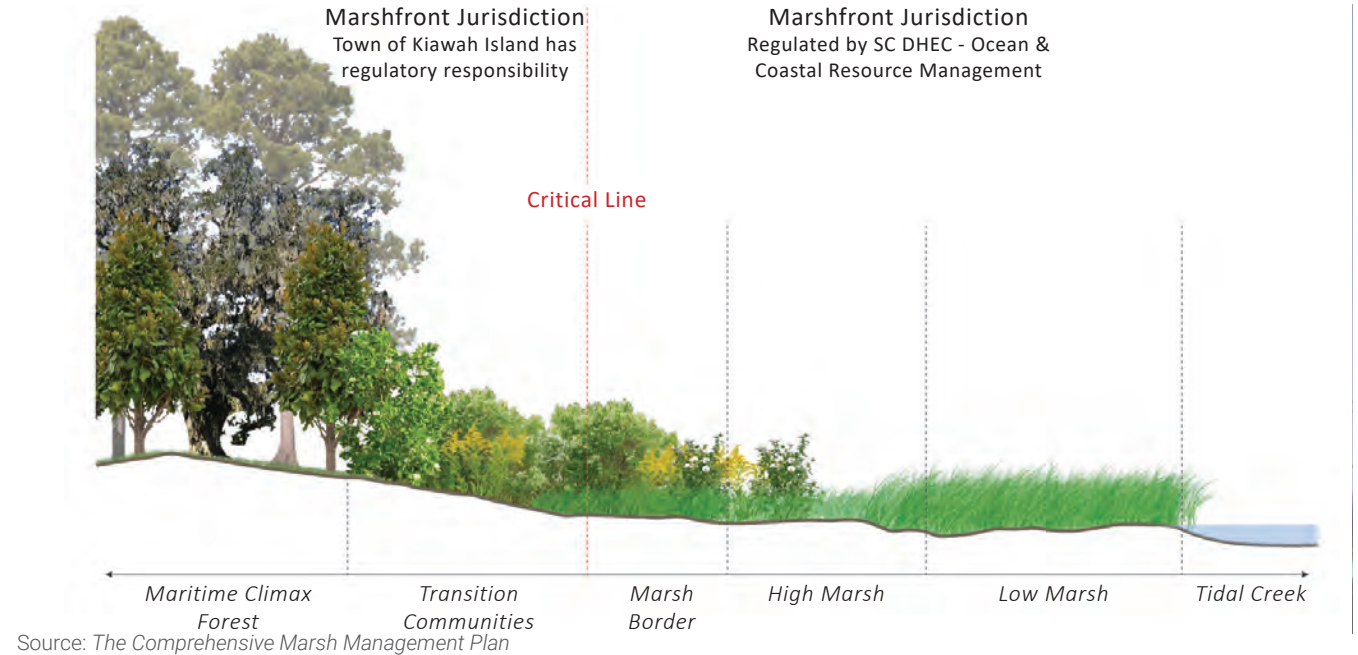
Kiawah Island's pristine beachfront

**Beach Management**

The oceanfront beach and dunes are a key component to life on Kiawah Island. This habitat is a home to a variety of plant and animal species, protects inlands from stormwater surges, and is a key experience for occupants on the island. Vital beach and dune monitoring along with recommended restoration projects have been executed by Coastal Science and Engineering. These restoration projects include the efforts made on the East End Beach in 2006 and 2015 to protect the island from the effects of erosion near homes and the Ocean Course. There was

a sand scraping project conducted in 2017 to 2018 as well to rebuild dunes damaged by Hurricane Irma.

The 2020 *Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan* highlights key issues the beach faces, which include dog management, beach walk over maintenance, and protection of critical wildlife habitat areas. The shoals of Stono Inlet serve as natural breakwaters and provide beach growth when there are strong surges that move sand.



Source: The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan

**Marsh Ecosystem and Management Plan**

Approximately 55 percent of Kiawah Island consists of marshland and water. These ecosystems serve critical functions:

1. Filtering water
2. Absorbing rainwater to slow flooding effects
3. Providing habitat for diverse species
4. Acting as a protective barrier against storms and flooding

In April 2022, the Town of Kiawah Planning Department initiated the development of a Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan (CMMP), the first document focused solely on marsh management for the Town. Biohabitats and Elko Coastal Consulting assisted in developing the plan, which was adopted by the Town Council on February 7, 2023. Several studies on water quality and wetland health have been conducted to monitor the natural environment of Kiawah Island:

- The Kiawah Conservancy completed a

watershed and groundwater table study in 2022

- KICA's Lake Management Department tests 26 of the 122 stormwater ponds weekly

**Marsh Management Goals**

The CMMP establishes four key goals:

1. MONITOR: Detect changes in wetland vegetation species composition and structure over time
2. PROTECT: Prevent or correct impairments to the marsh through regulations
3. ENGAGE: Educate stakeholders about undesirable marsh changes
4. RESTORE: Manage vulnerable areas and mitigate future issues

Implementation will involve collaboration between the Town, KICA, and the Kiawah Island Conservancy. Potential restoration methods include thin layer placement, prescribed

NATURAL RESOURCES

burning, resiliency terracing, and oyster reestablishment.

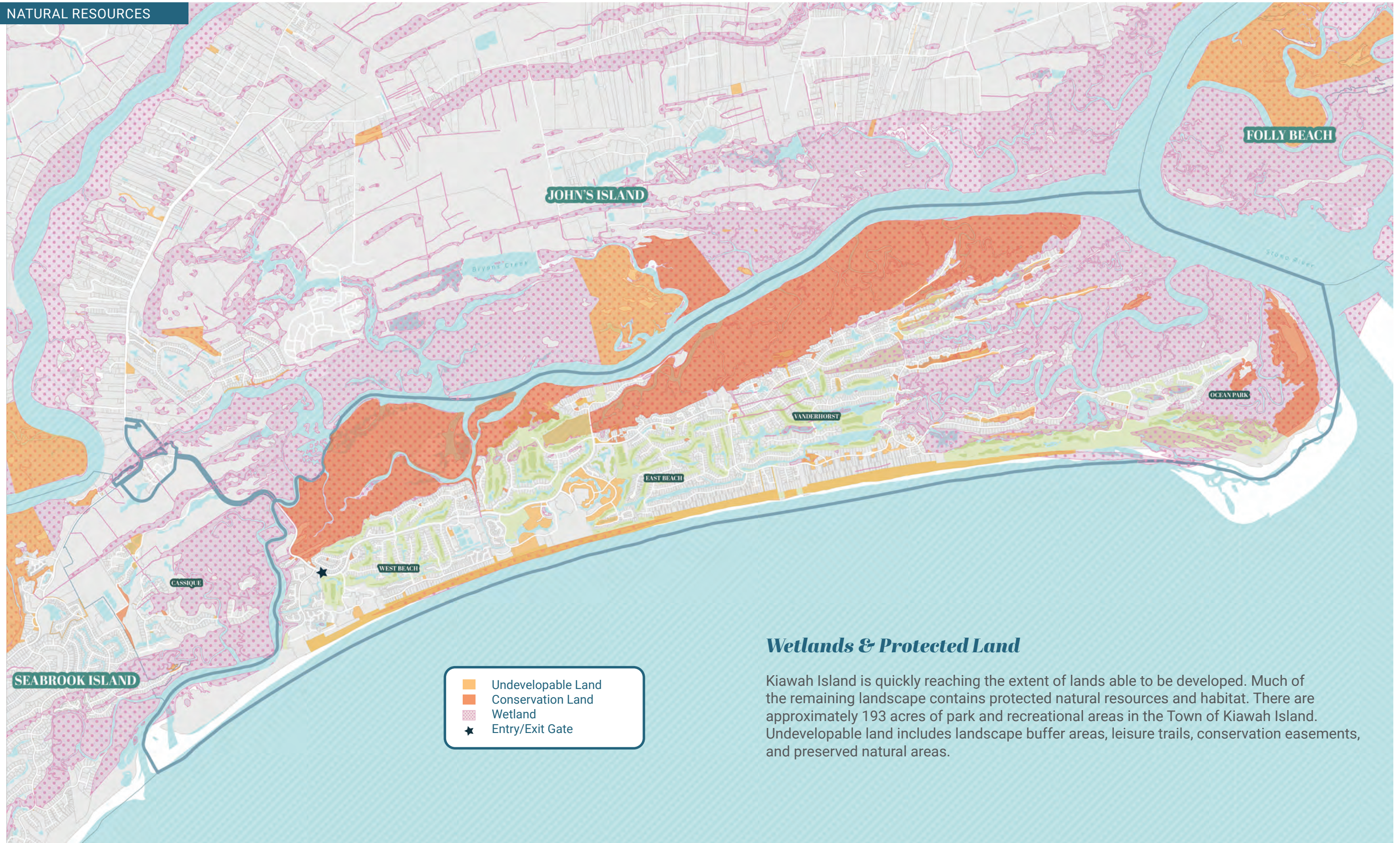
Community engagement is crucial for the success of these efforts, with informed stewards playing a vital role in marsh preservation through awareness and active participation.

Key Indicators: UVVR & Shoreline Change



UVVR & SHORELINE EROSION This figure shows two important indicators that are recommended elements of the monitoring plan, the unvegetated to vegetated ratio (UVVR), and current patterns of erosion and accretion. UVVR can be informative about the current trajectory of a marsh. A stable tidal marsh, with intact marsh plains and little deterioration tends to a UVVR of about 0.1. Higher values indicate degradation, usually a result of open water conversion. The other dataset on this figure shows eroding areas in red and newly formed land in yellow.

NATURAL RESOURCES



**Wetlands & Protected Land**

Kiawah Island is quickly reaching the extent of lands able to be developed. Much of the remaining landscape contains protected natural resources and habitat. There are approximately 193 acres of park and recreational areas in the Town of Kiawah Island. Undevelopable land includes landscape buffer areas, leisure trails, conservation easements, and preserved natural areas.

NATURAL RESOURCES

**Captain Sam's Spit**

Captain Sams Spit, located at the western end of Kiawah Island, is an environmentally sensitive and dynamically changing area that plays a crucial role in the island's coastal ecosystem. This spit, is bounded by Captain Sams Inlet and serves as a critical transition zone between Kiawah and Seabrook Islands.

Between November 2022 and October 2023, Captain Sams Spit experienced significant changes, losing approximately 52,900 cubic yards of sand (-6.0 cy/ft). This loss is likely attributed to underwater shifts in the position of the main inlet channel between survey lines 1 and 3. Despite these recent losses, the spit has historically been an area of accretion, acting as a collection site for sand transported by longshore currents from upcoast areas.

The spit's dynamics are heavily influenced by

the migration of Captain Sams Inlet. As wave action transports sand westward, it feeds the spit, causing growth into the inlet and forcing it to migrate toward Seabrook Island. This natural process is part of a cyclical pattern that has led to previous inlet relocation projects, the most recent occurring in June 2015 when the inlet was moved approximately 3,000 feet to the east.

Since the 2015 relocation, the spit has been evolving predictably. Intertidal bars have formed along the inlet margin and seaward on the Kiawah side of the channel, coinciding with the growth of a new ebb-tidal delta. This evolution follows historical trends observed after previous inlet relocations in 1983 and 1996.

The spit area is of particular environmental

importance due to its role as habitat for various coastal species, including shorebirds and sea turtles. The dynamic nature of the spit, with its changing shorelines and sandbar formations, provides essential feeding and nesting grounds for these species.

Looking forward, the report suggests that another inlet relocation project may be necessary within the next five to seven years, highlighting the ongoing management needs of this dynamic area. Continuous monitoring of the spit's evolution is crucial for understanding its changes and planning any necessary interventions.

In conclusion, Captain Sams Spit remains a critical and sensitive environmental area. Its dynamic nature, ecological importance, and role in the broader coastal system of Kiawah and Seabrook Islands underscore the need for ongoing careful management and conservation efforts to maintain its environmental integrity and natural processes.

*Source: Coastal Science Engineering, Kiawah Monitoring Report, 2023*

**East Beach**

The East End of Kiawah Island represents a critically important and environmentally sensitive area, characterized by its dynamic coastal processes and diverse habitats. This region, encompassing the Lagoon Reach and Stono Inlet Reach, is significantly influenced by shoal bypassing events from Stono Inlet, which play a crucial role in the area's geomorphological evolution and ecological health.

Between November 2022 and October 2023, the Lagoon Reach gained approximately 99,300 cubic yards of sand, while the Stono Inlet Reach experienced a loss of about 42,100 cubic yards. These changes are part of an ongoing large shoal bypassing event that began in 2019, with a shoal containing over 1 million cubic yards of sand currently attaching to the island. This

natural process is vital for replenishing beach volumes and maintaining the overall health of the coastal ecosystem.

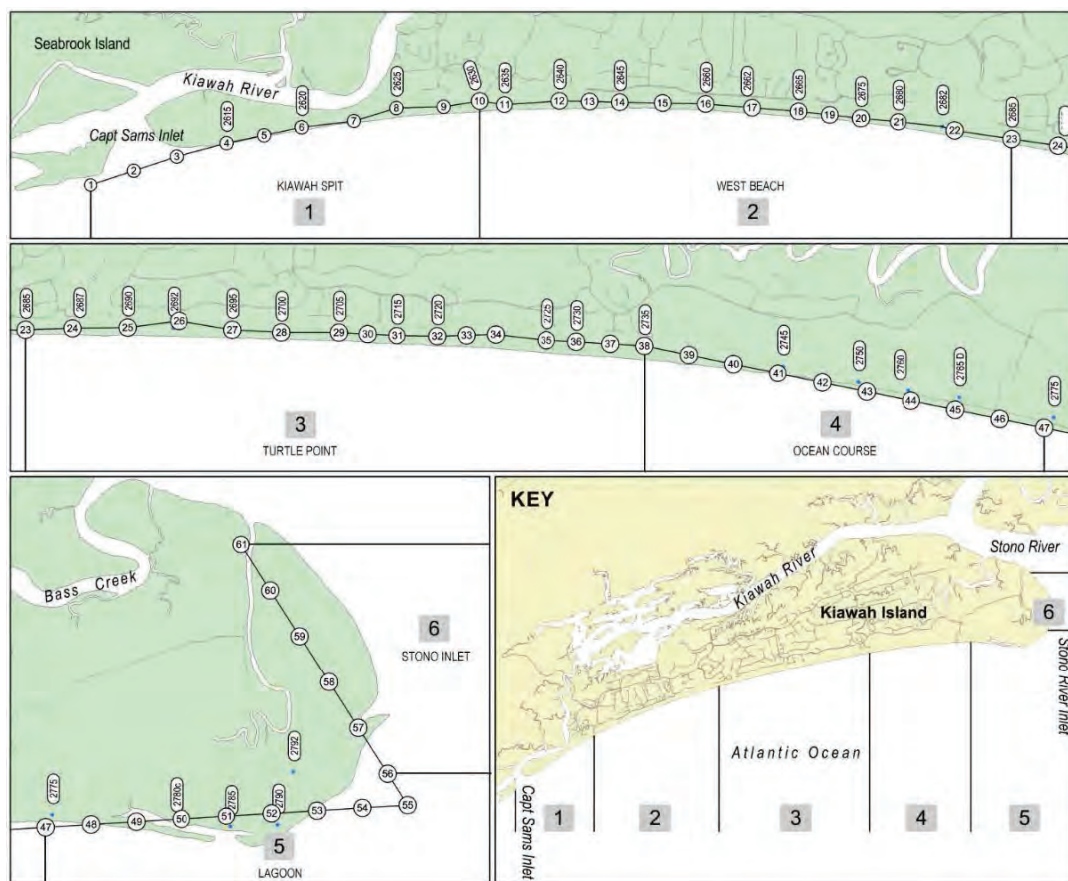
The East End's environmental significance is further underscored by its marsh habitats and drainage systems. Two flushing channels that opened after Hurricanes Matthew (2016) and Irma (2017) remain active, providing crucial drainage for the east-end marshes. These marshes serve as important habitats for various species and play a key role in the island's ecological balance.

Of particular note is the area's importance for wildlife, especially threatened species like the piping plover. The dynamic nature of the East End, with its changing shorelines and varied habitats, provides essential feeding and nesting grounds for these and other coastal bird species.

The ongoing shoal bypass event is expected to provide sufficient sand volumes to outpace background erosion over the next decade. This natural process is critical for maintaining the beach-dune system, which not only provides storm protection but also supports a diverse ecosystem.

Continuous monitoring and adaptive management of this area are essential. Experts recommend ongoing observation of the 2015 channel location, closure dike, and shoal attachment area. The natural flushing channel between the shoal and outer beach also requires attention, as it may need minor remedial action to ensure proper marsh drainage.

In conclusion, the East End of Kiawah Island is an environmentally sensitive area of paramount importance. Its dynamic coastal processes, diverse habitats, and role in supporting wildlife make it a critical focus for conservation efforts and careful management to ensure its long-term ecological health and resilience.





## natural resources objectives and strategies

### GOAL NR:

**Preserve Kiawah's greatest natural assets and habitat.**

#### Objective NR1

Champion the Live with Nature approach.

##### Strategy NR1.1

Consider strategies to protect natural habitats and corridors essential to the health and integrity of native plant and wildlife populations.

##### Strategy NR1.2

Consider appropriate strategies to protect the environmental character of sensitive properties.

- Captain Sam's Spit and East Beach areas.
- Areas affected by recent significant flooding events.

#### Objective NR2

Develop tools to encourage environmental stewardship.

##### Strategy NR2.1

Determine what tools, if any, can be used by TOKI to encourage environmental stewardship that aligns with Kiawah's focus on natural resource preservation.

- Engage property owners, and other regimes within Kiawah.

##### Strategy NR2.2

Define and Promote Environmental Initiatives.

- Become a leader in the implementation of projects and measures to protect, preserve, and improve the Island's natural landscape.
- Identify conservation goals and consider annexation of properties.
- Where appropriate, create regulations to enhance and protect natural resources.
- Increase awareness and utilization of the TOKI's Grow Native Initiative and database.

##### Strategy NR2.3

Align goals that represent all of Kiawah's environmental interests.

- Consider implementing relevant *Kiawah Go Green Initiative*.
- *The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan*
- *The Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan*
- *Ensure ongoing compliance with the adopted Landscape and Tree Preservation Ordinance, which embodies the "Living with Nature" philosophy.*
- Other existing initiatives and plans

##### Strategy NR2.4

Coordinate with Island Partners and the Community on issues relating to Natural Resources.

- Collaborate to consistently maintain and enhance all natural resources, of all forms, across Kiawah Island.
- Recognize environmental issues exist across ecosystems, irrespective of man-made boundaries, and member organizations.
- Consider where, if anywhere, increased protections serve Kiawah's landscape.

#### Objective NR3

Maintain and expand public environmental education and outreach programs.

##### Strategy NR3.1

Explore additional partnerships with conservation organizations.

- Increase public education on Kiawah's environmental protection and preservation goals, concerns, and objectives.



# 05



## cultural resourcesnext

*Steward and Advance Kiawah’s Cultural, Historical, and Community Excellence*

### **Cultural Resources**

*Considers historic buildings and structures, commercial districts, residential districts, unique, natural, or scenic resources, archaeological, and other cultural resources.*

### **Big Ideas**

- Kiawah Historical Society*
- Performing Arts Center*

### **Objectives**

- CR1 - Cultivate and refine cultural programming and services for residents and guests.*
- CR2 - Preserve and showcase Kiawah’s rich history and natural heritage.*
- CR3 - Support a Performing Arts organization to enhance cultural offerings on Kiawah Island.*

### **Overview**

This section explores the curated selection of arts and cultural events that grace the island throughout the year, from world-class performances to art exhibitions. It highlights the island’s venues that serve as gathering places for the community’s cultural and social engagements. The element delves into the recreational and educational opportunities available to residents and guests, underscoring Kiawah’s commitment to both physical well-being and intellectual enrichment.

Special attention is given to the island’s renowned golf courses, which have played a pivotal role in shaping Kiawah’s international reputation for excellence. Additionally, this section outlines the community’s strategic philanthropic initiatives that exemplify Kiawah’s leadership in responsible stewardship.

A brief overview of the island’s storied cultural history provides context for its evolution into the distinguished community it is today. Finally, the element sets forth refined objectives and strategies aimed at preserving and enhancing these cultural resources, ensuring that Kiawah’s unique heritage and community life continue to flourish in the years to come.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

**Arts and Cultural Activities and Events**

Kiawah Island boasts a carefully curated calendar of cultural programming that reflects its status as a premier coastal community. The island’s commitment to artistic excellence is evident in the caliber of events hosted throughout the year.

Established in 2004, the Town of Kiawah Island-funded Arts and Cultural Events Council has been instrumental in elevating Kiawah’s cultural landscape. This committee oversees a diverse array of programming designed to engage a wide range of interests. Events span from casual piano bars at the Sandcastle to intimate concerts featuring world-renowned artists and prestigious institutions like the Charleston Symphony Orchestra.

The council’s efforts have brought exceptional performers to the island, offering residents and guests access to high-quality cultural experiences within the unique setting of Kiawah.

The Art Guild of the Kiawah Island Community Association hosts the annual Art Guild Members Show and Sale. This event showcases the talents of Kiawah’s resident artists, featuring original paintings, photographs, handcrafted pottery, wooden items, jewelry, and home decorations. The show provides an opportunity for the community to appreciate and purchase locally created art in a welcoming island setting.

Freshfields Village, one of Kiawah Island’s central gathering place, hosts over 60 events annually. These include open-air concerts, film screenings, and festivals celebrating local arts and culture. The village’s annual art walk features artwork and live jazz performances, offering refined entertainment for residents and visitors.



Source: “6 Events to Ring in Spring at The Village”, Freshfields Village

**Recreational and Educational Activities**

Kiawah Island provides diverse recreational and educational opportunities. Its beaches, bike paths, and maritime forests offer settings for various outdoor activities.

The Kiawah Island Nature Program offers guided experiences showcasing the island’s ecosystem. Activities include kayaking excursions and birding walks, providing encounters with Kiawah’s natural environment.

The Sandcastle, an oceanfront facility for Kiawah property owners, offers fitness classes, aquatic programs, and enrichment activities. It hosts lectures and workshops by experts, catering to residents’ interests.

Kiawah offers opportunities for water activities including stand-up paddleboarding and fishing. The Kiawah Island Golf Resort provides instruction and guided excursions for various skill levels.

The Roy Barth Tennis Center offers high-quality facilities and coaching. Ranked among top tennis resorts globally, it provides an excellent environment for players to improve and enjoy the sport.

The Kiawah Conservancy contributes significantly to environmental stewardship and education on the island. It engages residents in conservation efforts and enhances their understanding of Kiawah’s ecosystems through nature walks, workshops on native flora, and citizen science initiatives.

**Premiere Golf Culture**

Kiawah Island’s golf offerings represent the pinnacle of the sport, cementing the island’s reputation as a world-class golf destination. With seven exceptional courses, each offering unique challenges and breathtaking coastal vistas, Kiawah provides an unparalleled experience for golf enthusiasts.

The crown jewel of Kiawah’s golf portfolio is The Ocean Course. Designed by the legendary Pete Dye, this masterpiece has hosted multiple major championships, including the 1991 Ryder Cup and PGA Championships in 2012 and 2021. The 2031 PGA Tour Championship will again be held on this elite course.

Complementing The Ocean Course are equally impressive designs by golf’s most respected architects. Jack Nicklaus’s Turtle Point offers a more traditional layout with precision-demanding fairways and greens. Tom Fazio’s Osprey Point weaves through Kiawah’s maritime forests and saltwater marshes, blending strategic challenges with natural beauty. Gary Player’s redesigned Cougar Point provides spectacular vistas of the Kiawah River and surrounding marshlands.

Off-island but nearby, Oak Point, located in Kiawah River Estates, rounds out the golfing experience. Originally conceived by Clyde Johnston, this course sits by the Kiawah River and Haulover Creek.

For members of the Kiawah Island Club, two additional world-class courses await. Tom Watson’s Cassique offers a links-style experience reminiscent of Scotland and Ireland’s finest courses, while Tom Fazio’s River Course meanders along the Kiawah River and Bass Pond, providing a stunning backdrop for golf.

Kiawah’s commitment to golfing excellence extends beyond the courses themselves. A state-of-the-art Golf Learning Center offers cutting-edge technology and instruction from top professionals, allowing golfers to refine their skills in a premier setting. Multiple tournaments and events foster a vibrant golfing community among the island’s residents and their guests.

All of Kiawah Island Golf Resort courses are certified as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries, demonstrating the island’s dedication to environmental stewardship alongside golfing excellence. This commitment ensures that Kiawah’s golf experiences are not only world-class but also sustainable, preserving the island’s natural beauty for future generations.



Highly ranked golf courses are set in the lush natural environment.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

**Community Outreach**

Kiawah Island's approach to community outreach exemplifies its commitment to responsible stewardship and strategic philanthropy. The island's residents and organizations engage in carefully selected initiatives that make meaningful impacts across the sea island and Lowcountry region.

The Town of Kiawah Island's Charitable Contributions program stands as a cornerstone of these efforts. This initiative thoughtfully allocates town financial resources annually to support non-profit organizations serving the sea islands. By focusing on critical areas such as health and wellness, hunger relief, and housing stability, the Town demonstrates its dedication to addressing pressing social issues in a targeted and impactful manner.

The Kiawah Island Community Association has refined its community engagement through the "Kiawah Cares" initiative. This program serves as a conduit between Kiawah residents and select non-profit organizations on Johns and Wadmalaw Islands. Through curated volunteer opportunities, strategic fundraising events, and targeted educational programs, Kiawah Cares enables residents to participate in meaningful support of neighboring communities.

Education remains a key focus of Kiawah's outreach efforts. The island's various organizations collaborate to provide selective scholarships, mentoring programs, and educational resources to promising students in need. These efforts not only support individual students but also contribute to the long-term development and prosperity of the entire region.

Environmental stewardship extends beyond Kiawah's shores through the work of the Kiawah Conservancy. The organization shares its expertise with regional schools and community groups, promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices throughout the Lowcountry.

In times of crisis, Kiawah's community demonstrates its commitment to the broader region. Residents and organizations mobilize swiftly to provide targeted emergency relief, supplies, and support to affected communities in the surrounding areas.

Through these refined and strategic outreach efforts, Kiawah Island demonstrates that true community leadership extends beyond geographical boundaries. By engaging thoughtfully with its neighbors, Kiawah not only enhances the quality of life for those in need but also enriches its own community, creating a legacy of responsible stewardship that benefits the entire region.

**Performing Arts Center**

The Town of Kiawah Island is exploring the possibility of supporting a Performing Arts Center, to be created and operated by a separate 501(c)(3) organization. This initiative aims to enhance cultural offerings on the island. The town is considering establishing a formal partnership with the center, if located within Kiawah Island, and providing various forms of support. This could include exploring funding opportunities, assisting with location scouting, and offering resources to help establish and grow the center's programs. The potential Performing Arts Center represents a significant opportunity to expand Kiawah Island's cultural landscape, offering residents and visitors access to high-quality performing arts experiences within the community.

**Cultural History**

Kiawah Island's rich heritage spans centuries, from its early inhabitants to its present-day status as a premier coastal community. The island is named after the Kiawah Native Americans, who were its original stewards before English settlers arrived in 1670.

The colonial era began when John Stanyarne acquired Kiawah in two halves in 1717 and 1737. Stanyarne, a prominent planter, established a thriving plantation, setting the stage for Kiawah's agricultural legacy. This legacy continued under the stewardship of the Vanderhorst family, who maintained the plantation until the Civil War.

The Civil War marked a significant turning point for Kiawah. As the Vanderhorst family sought refuge elsewhere, the island became home to formerly enslaved individuals, many of whom had worked the land under the previous system. The post-war Reconstruction era brought complex changes to Kiawah's social and economic landscape. When the Vanderhorsts returned, they adapted their agricultural practices to new realities. During this period, Quash Stevens, a former slave and son of the plantation's previous owner, assumed a managerial role. His position exemplified the evolving social dynamics of the time.

The mid-20th century heralded a new chapter for Kiawah. In 1950, C.C. Royal of Aiken purchased the land for logging and timber production, shifting away from agriculture. The first summer homes, built along Eugenia Avenue in 1954, marked the beginning of Kiawah's transformation into a residential destination.

A pivotal moment came in 1974 when the Kuwait Investment Corporation acquired the island, setting in motion its development as a world-class resort. The opening of the Kiawah Island Resort in 1976, complete with its inn, amenities, and golf course, established the foundation for Kiawah's current reputation.

Today, Kiawah Island stands as a testament to thoughtful development that honors its multifaceted history while providing an unparalleled living experience. The island's journey reflects the broader narrative of the Lowcountry, making Kiawah not just a place of natural beauty but also of significant historical interest.

**Kiawah Island Historic Society**

The Town aims to preserve its cultural heritage through the creation of the Kiawah Island Historic Society (KIHS). This group would be responsible for establishing listings for historic and archaeological resources on the National Register of Historic Places. Currently the only two listings include the Arnoldus Vanderhorst House as of 1973, and the Bass Pond Site in 1979.

The Bass Pond site, located near what is now Rhett's Bluff, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places because the site is a prehistoric "shell midden area." A midden is a mound of domestic waste/refuse containing shells, animal bone, and cultural materials marking the site of a prehistoric settlement. The Bass Pond site is the only midden not being affected by natural erosion and is crucially significant to understanding indigenous human cultural processes during the Formative Period.



**cultural resources objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

Preserve and enhance Kiawah’s distinctive culture, traditions, and heritage.

**Objective CR1**

Cultivate and refine cultural programming and services for residents and guests.

**Strategy CR1.1**

Curate a selection of high-quality cultural offerings that align with the interests of Kiawah’s residents and visitors.

- Partner with renowned artists, performers, and lecturers to bring exclusive cultural experiences to the island.
- Develop a year-round calendar of events that balances traditional favorites with carefully selected new offerings.

**Strategy CR1.2**

Coordinate with other public and private organizations to encourage further development of arts and cultural activities.

- Promote available events and programs for the benefit of Kiawah residents and visitors.

**Objective CR2**

Preserve and showcase Kiawah’s rich history and natural heritage.

**Strategy CR2.1**

Support the Kiawah Island Historic Society

- Provide resources for the KIHS to conduct thorough research on Kiawah’s history, from indigenous inhabitants to

present day.

- Promote the identification and preservation of archaeological and historic resources located on Kiawah Island.

**Objective CR3**

Support a Performing Arts organization to enhance cultural offerings on Kiawah Island.

**Strategy CR3.1**

Explore a formal partnership with a Performing Arts Center, if located in the town of Kiawah Island.

- Development a memorandum of understanding outlining the scope of support and collaboration.
- Designate a town liaison to facilitate communication and coordination with the organization.

**Strategy CR3.2**

Consider providing resources and support to help establish and grow a Performing Arts center and program on Kiawah Island.

- Explore opportunities for financial support through grants or dedicated funding.
- Assist if needed in identifying and securing suitable location to build the new venue.



# 06



## community facilitiesnext

*Maintain and improve Kiawah’s amenities, utilities, and services.*

### **Community Facilities**

*Considers water supply, treatment, and distribution; sewage system and wastewater treatment; solid waste collection and disposal, fire protection, emergency medical services, and general government facilities; education facilities; and libraries and other facilities.*

### **Big Ideas**

- Future Service Providers*
- Kiawah Goes Green Initiative*
- Centralized Communications Channel*

### **Objectives**

- CF1 - Centralize communications across all key stakeholders.*
- CF2 - Develop a Flexible Framework for Public Safety Study Evaluation and Potential Implementation.*
- CF3 - Develop a comprehensive EV charging network on Kiawah Island to support EV usage among residents and visitors.*

### **Overview**

Kiawah Island’s essential services are provided by multiple entities. Utilities are managed by Berkeley Electric Cooperative (electricity), Kiawah Island Utility (water and wastewater), and various telecommunications companies. Emergency services are coordinated among St. Johns Fire Department (fire protection), Charleston County EMS (medical emergencies), and Barrier Island Ocean Rescue (beach patrol and coastal medical response). These organizations collaborate to ensure the safety and comfort of Kiawah’s residents and visitors.

The island’s community facilities are predominantly operated by private entities. The Kiawah Island Community Association offers members amenities like the Sandcastle and leisure trails, while Kiawah Island Golf Resort manages recreational facilities such as golf courses and tennis courts. Kiawah Partners oversees exclusive club member amenities.

Town of Kiawah Island aims to improve service coordination, centralize communications, and enhance amenities and utilities.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



**Critical Service Providers**

The Charleston County EMS Department is responsible for providing EMS throughout Charleston County, including the Town of Kiawah Island. There is also the Kiawah Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) which offers limited training opportunities that enable volunteers to assist professional first responders in the event of a disaster on the island.

Fire protection is provided by the St. Johns Fire District, that is headquartered on Johns Island.

There are two stations located on Kiawah Island to ensure a fast response.

The Town of Kiawah Island does not operate its own police or security force, however public safety services are offered and projected to grow. The Charleston County Sheriff’s Department provides law enforcement and investigative support for the Town of Kiawah Island. Additionally, the Town contracts with the Sheriff’s Office for off-duty deputies to provide supplementary coverage for law

enforcement patrols, traffic control, and enforcement. The Town funds 75% of the Sheriff’s off-duty deputy costs through the State Accommodations Tax Fund and 25% is funded from the Town’s General Fund.

The Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) provides limited security services behind the main gate. The Kiawah Island Golf Resort also manages limited security for their properties.

Islands communities. There is a great need for this facility; the service area is experiencing significant growth in its senior population. This demographic shift is expected to continue in the coming years, with a substantial increase in the number of residents aged 65 and up. This growing senior population will likely increase the demand for outpatient and emergent health care services in the region, including areas serving Kiawah Island.

This new facility is scheduled to open in late 2025.

**Future Critical Service Providers**

There are plans to offer new service provider developments in the area to close the gap on distance to services. St. Johns Fire Department plans for a future station inside the Kiawah River development, neighboring the Town.

There are plans under development to build a Medical University of South Carolina Sea Islands Medical Pavilion to service the Sea



COMMUNITY FACILITIES

**Utility Service Providers**

Kiawah Island utility services are facilitated by many private entities. The Town’s goal is to ensure the highest quality of service, regardless of which entity is providing the service.

The Town of Kiawah Island should assess the following services every five years to ensure the needs of the community are being met. This report should be made available to residents and key island stakeholders.

**Water and Wastewater Facilities**

Water and wastewater services are provided by the Kiawah Island Utility, Inc. (KIU), a private firm. There is currently a total of 4.5 million gallons above ground storage on the Island; 3.5 at the Sora Rail facility and 1 mg at the Governors Drive facility.

KIU operates two Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) systems. The first one, located at the main facility on Sora Rail Road and the second one, located on Governors Drive. ASR is used for peak shaving and emergency situations by allowing KIU to store water in an underground aquifer during the non-peak season for use during emergencies and heavy demand periods. In 2015, a new water supply line to the Island was installed to connect to the Down Island Pump Station on Governors Drive.

**Solid Waste Management**

The Town of Kiawah Island provides a comprehensive solid waste program for property owners. This service includes garbage, recycling, yard debris, brown trash, paper shredding, and hazardous waste. Types of garbage service includes curbside and backdoor service.

Recycling is available to all single-family homes, homeowner associations, and some villa communities. The Town also provides public recycling centers located on Sora Rail Road, the Municipal Center, and behind the KICA homeowner’s association building.

**Electric and Communication Utilities**

Berkeley Electric Cooperative (BEC) services over 100,000 accounts in Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester counties with over 5,000 miles of line connecting them all together.

The electricity lines on the Island are all underground and available Island-wide. The cooperative maintains the electric lines on the Island, including updating them in 2008-2010, but power outages are common due to severe weather or damage to lines. BEC has rebuilt the Kiawah Island regulator station and replaced circuits connecting the station to the front gate. Other improvements include electric line upgrades on Ocean Park and Riverview.

Telephone providers on the island include AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint. AT&T is the largest network provider on the island as well as offering cable and internet services. Other internet servers include Xfinity, Viasat, HughesNet, Always ON, Starlink, and T-Mobile Home Internet.

**Public Safety**

Today, the Town of Kiawah does not have a dedicated, permanent law enforcement facility or force. The Town currently fulfills this need with its partnership with the Charleston County Sheriff’s department with off-duty deputies. There are currently 25 off-duty, deputy-sworn personnel.

The Town of Kiawah Island is currently undergoing a comprehensive need assessment and gap analysis of current public safety and police services. This is not limited to police but includes code enforcement, EMS and fire department services as well.

This evaluation is designed to determine the potential to achieve the following benefits for the community:

- Assess current community policing needs

- Project the impact of future growth on community safety
- Identify gaps in existing public safety services
- Determine the necessity for enhanced or expanded services
- Provide cost analysis and cost avoidance opportunities for present and future needs
- Explain the potential impact on future state and federal grant funding



St. John's Fire District Station 4

### Central Communications Channel

The Town proposes that a Central Communications Channel would be a coordinated effort between all key island stakeholders, managed and operated by the Town of Kiawah Island’s Public Safety or Communications Department. This department would be responsible for overseeing the communication system, ensuring its effectiveness, and maintaining its operation

The proposed system would include:

- A dedicated emergency communications center within the Town Hall.
- A multi-platform approach, including a mobile app, text alerts, email notifications, and a centralized website.
- Regular training and drills for all stakeholders to ensure familiarity with the system.
- Clear protocols for information dissemination during both routine and emergency situations.
- Integration with existing emergency management systems at the county and state levels.

By centralizing communication under the Town’s authority, Kiawah Island would have a unified and direct method of communication, eliminating confusing or conflicting information. This approach would ensure that all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and visitors, receive timely, accurate, and consistent information. In an emergency, this could prove critical to the swift response of dedicated personnel and the safety of the island’s population.

The Town would also establish a Communication Liaison Committee,

comprising representatives from key stakeholder groups, to provide input and feedback on the system’s operation and effectiveness. This collaborative approach would help maintain open lines of communication between various entities while ensuring a streamlined and efficient information dissemination process.

### Kiawah Go Green Initiative

The Kiawah Go Green Initiative (KGGI) demonstrates the Town of Kiawah Island’s commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. Key efforts include:

1. Promoting electric vehicles:
  - Installing EV charging stations at Town Hall
  - Encouraging island-wide EV adoption
2. Reducing waste:
  - Limiting single-use plastics
  - Collecting hazardous waste
  - Piloting battery-operated landscaping equipment
  - Exploring central composting
3. Exploring renewable energy:
  - Investigating solar panel requirements
4. Pursuing green tourism:
  - Working towards certification as a Green Tourist Destination

The Town encourages all island entities to implement eco-friendly practices while maintaining operational efficiency. The goal is to become a leader in protecting Kiawah’s environment, including its beaches and marshes.

### Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

There are up to 300 electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in-hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) registered on the Island. 3,000 EVs are registered in a 50-mile radius around Kiawah Island. As the number of EVs on the roads of Kiawah continue(s) to rise, the island (Town) should contribute to this green effort of island residents and visitors through the implementation of a standardized network of EV Charging stations. Many of the HOA regimes on the Island prohibit the installation of private charging stations. Therefore, it is essential for the Town and other Kiawah Island stakeholders to develop their own public charging stations.

Currently, the Town of Kiawah Island has installed three public EV charging stations located behind Town Hall. Other municipalities in our vicinity (e.g., Hilton Head, Edisto, Folly Beach, and Mount Pleasant) have started to consider installing public charging stations.

### Amenity Service Providers

Public amenities on Kiawah Island, while limited, play a crucial role in the community’s landscape. Ideally in the future, there would be public EV charging sites at all of the island’s amenities to include Freshfield Village. The beach, owned by the State of South Carolina but managed by the Town of Kiawah Island, ensures local oversight of this vital natural resource. This management structure allows for community-focused stewardship while maintaining public ownership.

Beachwalker County Park, which operates under a 99-year lease agreement established in 1976 between Kiawah Partners (now South Street Partners) and Charleston County Gov-

ernment. Managed by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission, this park provides an essential public access point to the beach. Together, these amenities strike a delicate balance between Kiawah’s exclusive offerings and public accessibility, maintaining a connection to the broader community while preserving the island’s unique character.

Kiawah Island boasts an extensive array of private amenities managed by several key organizations, contributing to its reputation as a premier resort and residential community. The Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR) is a major provider, offering five world-class golf courses, The Sanctuary Hotel and Spa, multiple dining venues, and tennis facilities. The Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) manages community-centric amenities including the Sandcastle Community Center, three boat landings, and various pools and parks.

Further enhancing the island’s offerings, Kiawah Partners/South Street Partners operates two additional golf courses, The Beach Club, Sasanqua Spa, and several dining establishments. The nearby Freshfields Village, managed by Edens, rounds out the amenities with a village style shopping center, multiple dining options, and various services. Collectively, these private amenities provide residents and visitors with seven golf courses, over 15 restaurants, two luxury spas, multiple sports facilities, and numerous recreational options. This diverse range of high-quality amenities caters to a wide array of interests and lifestyles, from golf and tennis enthusiasts to those seeking relaxation, fine dining, or outdoor adventures, all while maintaining the island’s natural beauty.



**community facilities**  
**objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

*Maintain and improve Kiawah’s amenities, utilities, and services.*

**Objective CF1**

Centralize communications across all key stakeholders.

**Strategy CF1.1**

Create a Centralized Communications Channel to share and align all island-wide messaging to reach community members on facility updates.

- Effectively communicate with the population of Kiawah, while reducing communication fatigue.
- Coordinate across member organizations to collect, consolidate, and streamline messaging.
- Define the most effective channel to reach the greatest number of Kiawah’s population.
- Identify and brand the channel for effective awareness.

**Objective CF2**

Develop a flexible framework for public safety study evaluation and potential implementation.

**Strategy CF2.1**

Develop a post-study review and implementation framework.

- Form a review committee (e.g., Public Safety Committee) to assess study recommendations.
- Engage key stakeholders and community members on potential implementation actions.
- Create a feedback mechanism for gathering input on proposed options
- Develop an action plan based on committee findings for Town Council consideration.

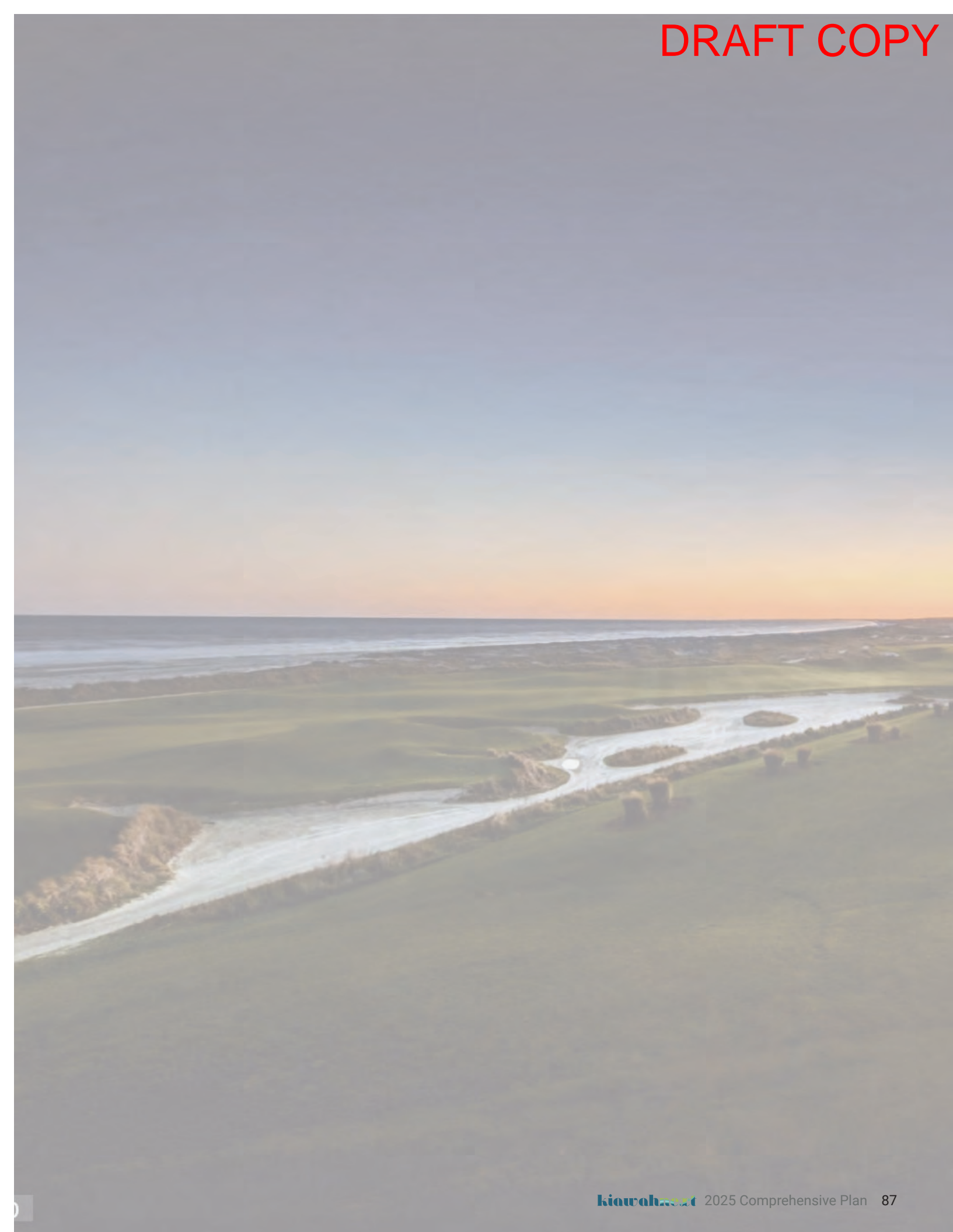
**Objective CF3**

Develop a comprehensive EV charging network on Kiawah Island to support EV usage among residents and visitors.

**Strategy CF3.1**

Establish a Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Plan.

- Assess EV usage and engage stakeholders (TOKI, KICA, HOAs, FFs) to plan and implement a phased charging infrastructure expansion
- Estimate how many EVs live on/visit the island by using several data collection sources.
- Continue to partner with BEC.
- Explore funding sources.



# 07



## housingnext

*Continue Kiawah’s excellent reputation as a vibrant coastal village.*

### *Housing*

*Considers location, types, age, and condition of housing, owner and renter occupancy, and affordability of housing.*

### *Big Ideas*

- Live with Nature*
- Market Analysis*

### *Objectives*

- H1 - Review housing data.*
- H2 – Encourage the redevelopment of properties through Live with Nature principles.*
- H3 - Monitor the development of housing in adjacent communities.*
- H4 - Promote and facilitate the redevelopment of existing properties to maintain Kiawah’s long-term market health and attractiveness.*

### *Overview*

Kiawah Island is a tapestry of residential neighborhoods, each contributing to the island’s unique character and charm. In recent years, Kiawah’s housing inventory has seen growth, particularly in owner-occupied units, which underscores the expanding resident base and the island’s allure as a place to call home.

This chapter delves into an analysis of Kiawah’s housing landscape, exploring topics such as housing makeup and market dynamics.

**Housing Types**

The Town of Kiawah Island features a diverse housing stock that caters to both permanent and part-time residents and short-term renters. As of July of 2024, the island comprises 4,146 housing units, offering a mix of the following housing types:

1. Single-family detached homes form the backbone of Kiawah’s housing inventory, accounting for 72% (2,973 units) of the total housing stock.
2. Multi-family properties, primarily represented by villas, make up another portion of Kiawah’s housing inventory that account for 28% (1,173 units) of the total housing stock. Villas typically offer condominium-style living.
3. Undeveloped Homesites: Representing potential for future housing growth, undeveloped homesites account for 9% (366 units) of the total inventory.

**Short-Term Rental Accommodations:**

Short-term rentals constitute a portion of Kiawah’s housing utilization, despite not being a separate category of physical housing. The island’s housing landscape is influenced by this trend, as evidenced by recent data. In July 2024, the Town reported a total of 4,146 housing units on Kiawah Island. Of these, 1,400 have been granted short-term rental business licenses. This translates to a notable 34% of the island’s total housing stock having the capacity to serve as short-term rental accommodations,

*Data Sources:*

*Housing inventory data (total units, single-family homes, villas, and undeveloped homesites) was obtained from the Charleston County Assessor Office Parcel Data Information as of July 2024.*

*Short-term rental information was provided by the Town of Kiawah Island, based on STR business license information as of July 2024.*

**Kiawah Island Real Estate Market Overview**

Kiawah Island’s real estate market continues to be characterized by high-value properties across various housing types, reflecting its status as a premium coastal destination. Recent data from Kiawah Island Real Estate for 2022 and 2023 provide insights into the current market trends:

**Single-Family Homes**

Single-family homes, forming the backbone of the island’s housing inventory, have shown steady appreciation. The median price for single-family homes increased from \$2.7 million in CY22 to \$2.9 million in CY23, representing a 7.4% year-over-year growth.

**Villas**

The villa segment has experienced a slight decrease in median prices, moving from \$775,000 in CY22 to \$710,000 in CY23, a 8.4% decline. Despite this adjustment, villas continue to offer a more accessible entry point into the Kiawah Island real estate market, catering to buyers seeking lower-maintenance options or vacation properties.

**Homesites**

Undeveloped homesites have seen significant appreciation, with median prices rising from \$675,000 in CY22 to \$795,000 in CY23, marking a substantial 17.8% increase. While this growth generally reflects the increasing value of land on the island, it’s important to note that this category encompasses a variety of lot types. Some homesites are indeed buildable, offering opportunities for custom home construction.

**Market Analysis**

Kiawah Island’s real estate market maintains its status as a premium destination, with median prices across all property types exceeding regional averages. The single-family home market continues to show strength,

driven by consistent demand for luxury properties. While villa prices have slightly decreased, they remain a significant market segment, offering diverse options for buyers.

The island’s real estate caters to buyers seeking high-quality homes, for both primary residences and vacation properties. Properties under \$1 million are limited, primarily comprising some villas and undeveloped lots. Recent trends demonstrate consistent demand across housing categories, underscoring Kiawah’s enduring appeal and resilience to broader market fluctuations.

The diversity in property types, especially in homesites, adds complexity to the market. Buyers invest not only in real estate but also in lifestyle opportunities, particularly through custom home construction. This multifaceted approach to property ownership contributes to the robustness and unique character of Kiawah Island’s real estate market.

### Kiawah Island Real Estate Market Overview: 2018-2023

Kiawah Island’s real estate market has experienced growth and transformation between 2018 and 2023, influenced by various factors including the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Increased demand possibly driven by remote work flexibility, desire for space, and perceived safety of island communities.

#### Market Trends

1. Single-Family Homes: Median prices more than doubled, from \$1.5 million in 2018 to \$3.1 million in 2023, with substantial jumps between 2020 and 2022.
2. Villas and Cottages: Steady appreciation from \$445,000 in 2018 to \$710,000 in 2023, a 59.6% increase.
3. Undeveloped Lots: Prices rose from \$385,000 in 2018 to \$849,000 in 2023, a 120.5% increase, with notable jumps in 2021 and 2022.

#### Market Characteristics

- Consistent appreciation across all housing categories since 2018, accelerating from 2020.
- Limited availability of properties under \$1 million, primarily some villas and undeveloped lots.
- Diverse property types catering to various buyer preferences, including buildable lots and those with club memberships.

The Kiawah Island real estate market remains robust, characterized by high-value properties and sustained demand. The island’s unique coastal environment, resort-style amenities, and adaptability to changing lifestyle preferences continue to attract discerning buyers for both primary and vacation homes.

#### COVID-19 Impact

The pandemic likely contributed to market growth, as evidenced by:

- Permanent population increase from 1,676 (2019) to 2,013 (2020), a 20% rise.
- Suspected surge in part-time residents and second home purchases (not reflected in census data).

#### Median Closing Price by Property Type Trends, Kiawah, 2018 – 2023

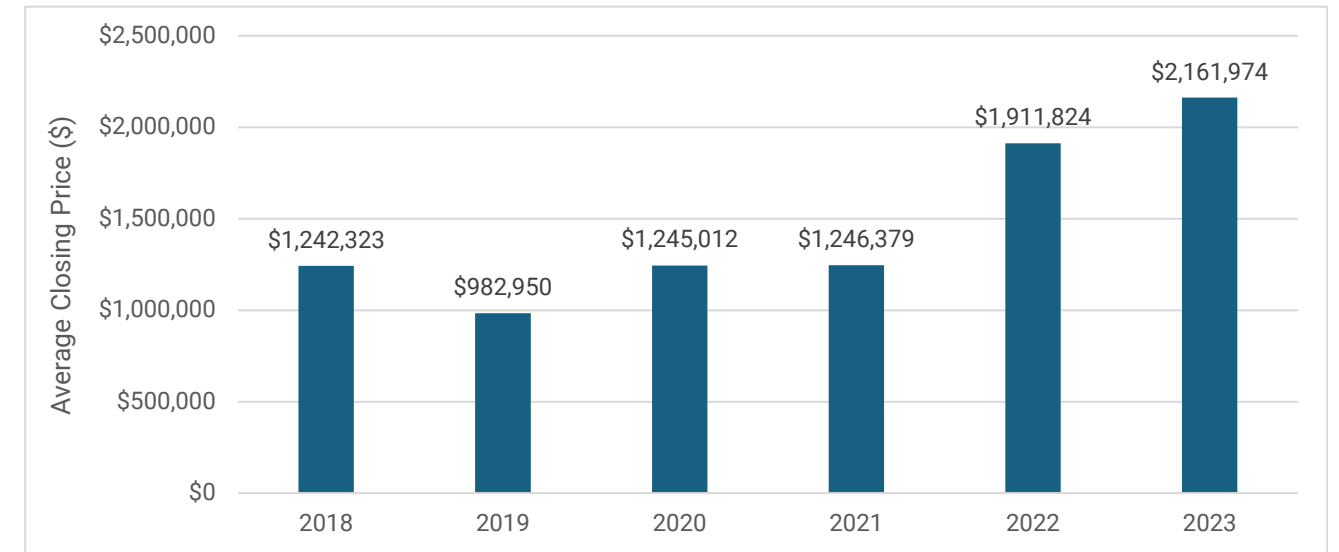
Source: Kiawah Island Property Report

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>SF Home Median Price</b>	\$1.5M	\$1.2M	\$1.5M	\$2M	\$2.7M	\$3.1M
<b>Villa/Cottage Median Price</b>	\$445K	\$450K	\$530K	\$625K	\$775K	\$710K
<b>Lot Median Price</b>	\$385K	\$375K	\$385K	\$451K	\$675K	\$849K

Note: This analysis includes sales data from Cassique. Population figures are based on U.S. Census data for permanent residents only.

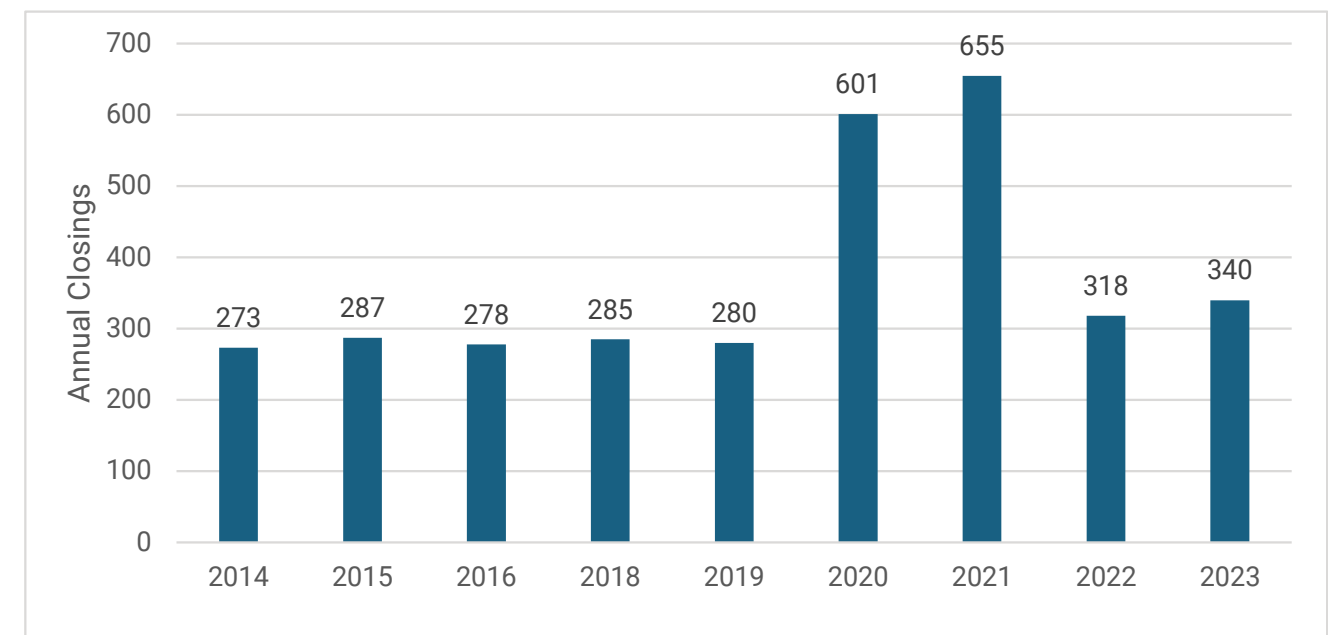
#### Combined Avg. Closing Price Trends, 2017 – 2023

Source: Kiawah Island Property Report



#### Combined Annual Closings, 2017 – 2023

Source: Kiawah Island Property Report



### Real Estate Market Overview: 2024 Update

Kiawah Island’s real estate market continues to demonstrate growth in 2024, building upon a trend of increasing property values and sales activity in recent years. According to the Kiawah Island Real Estate Property Report for January-June 2024, the first half of the year saw gains in both property values and transaction volume.

The combined average closing price on Kiawah Island reached \$2.52 million in the first half of 2024, a significant increase from the \$2.16 million average observed in the same period of 2023. This upward trajectory in property values has been consistent since 2022, which saw a 53.4% surge from the previous year, with the average closing price reaching \$1.91 million. For context, between 2017 and 2021, average closing prices on Kiawah Island ranged from approximately \$980,000 to \$1.24 million.

In terms of sales volume, the first half of 2024 has already witnessed 244 closings. This figure includes sales from The Cape, a new development that has significantly impacted villa statistics. The report notes that 58 villas from The Cape closed in the first half of 2024, accounting for over \$215 million in sales volume. This inclusion has notably inflated the villa sales data, contributing to the overall market performance.

While the current pace may not match the peak of 2021, which saw a record-breaking 655 closings, it represents a robust market compared to both recent years and pre-COVID levels. For comparison, 2023 and 2022 saw total closings of 340 and 318 respectively, while the average annual closings from 2014 to 2019 were approximately 280.

*Note: The Kiawah Island Real Estate Property Report includes data from both Kiawah Island and Cassique. While Cassique is not within Kiawah Island's town limits, it is considered an integral part of the Kiawah real estate market due to its adjacent location and shared amenities. This inclusion provides a more comprehensive view of the area's real estate performance.*

The sales volume in 2024 reflect ongoing buyer confidence in Kiawah Island real estate. This is further evidenced by the limited inventory, with only 2.6% of Island-wide properties listed at the end of Q2 2024, indicating a market that continues to favor sellers.

Kiawah Island’s appeal as a real estate destination is rooted in its unique combination of natural beauty and world-class amenities. As the market thrives in 2024, it demonstrates resilience and adaptability to changing buyer preferences and market conditions.

Looking ahead, the consistent demand and rising property values suggest a positive outlook for Kiawah Island’s real estate market. While it may not reach the unprecedented levels seen in 2021, the current trends indicate a stable and attractive market for both buyers and investors.

This analysis, based on the Kiawah Island Real Estate Property Report for January-June 2024, reflects island-wide sales data including homes, villas, and vacant properties. The inclusion of The Cape Sales in the data provides a comprehensive view of the market but also necessitates careful interpretation, particularly of the villa segment performance.

### Redevelopment: A Key Factor for Future Growth

As Kiawah Island approaches full development, redevelopment of existing properties is becoming increasingly critical for maintaining long-term market health and attracting new buyers. The HR&A study, completed in August 2020 for the Town, highlights several key factors that underscore the importance of redevelopment:

1. **Aging Housing Stock:** Redevelopment and renovation are crucial to keep these properties competitive and valuable.
2. **Reinvestment Trends:** The study showed a positive trend in renovation activity, with renovation permits having increased significantly since 2010. However, there's a disparity between housing types:
  - Single-family homes saw 138 renovation permits in 2019
  - Villas and cottages only had 34 permits in the same year
3. **Value Impact of Renovations:** Properties with renovation permits have consistently higher total assessment values. This effect is even more pronounced in newer properties, highlighting the importance of continuous reinvestment.
4. **Challenges for Villas:** Reinvestment in villas is more difficult under shared ownership models, posing long-term challenges for maintaining value in these properties as they age.
5. **Construction Costs:** High construction

costs on Kiawah (about 30% higher than the regional average) make redevelopment and reinvestment decisions more critical and potentially challenging.

To address these factors and encourage redevelopment, Kiawah is focusing on several initiatives:

- Streamlining contractor/builder permitting process by aligning requirements between TOKI, KICA and ARB.
- Considering incentives to encourage reinvestment, particularly in shared ownership properties like villas.
- Educating property owners and regime managers on the collective benefits of reinvestment.

By prioritizing redevelopment, Kiawah Island aims to maintain its competitive edge in the real estate market, ensure long-term property value growth, and continue attracting new generations of buyers while preserving its unique natural environment and community character.

HOUSING

**Workforce Housing**

Finding workforce housing in the greater Charleston area is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly for workers employed on Kiawah Island. This situation has led to significant commuting patterns and associated issues for the island’s workforce.

Census data reveals that nearly three-quarters of all workers on Kiawah Island travel more than 25 miles to reach their jobs. This substantial commute is due to the scarcity of affordable housing options closer to the island

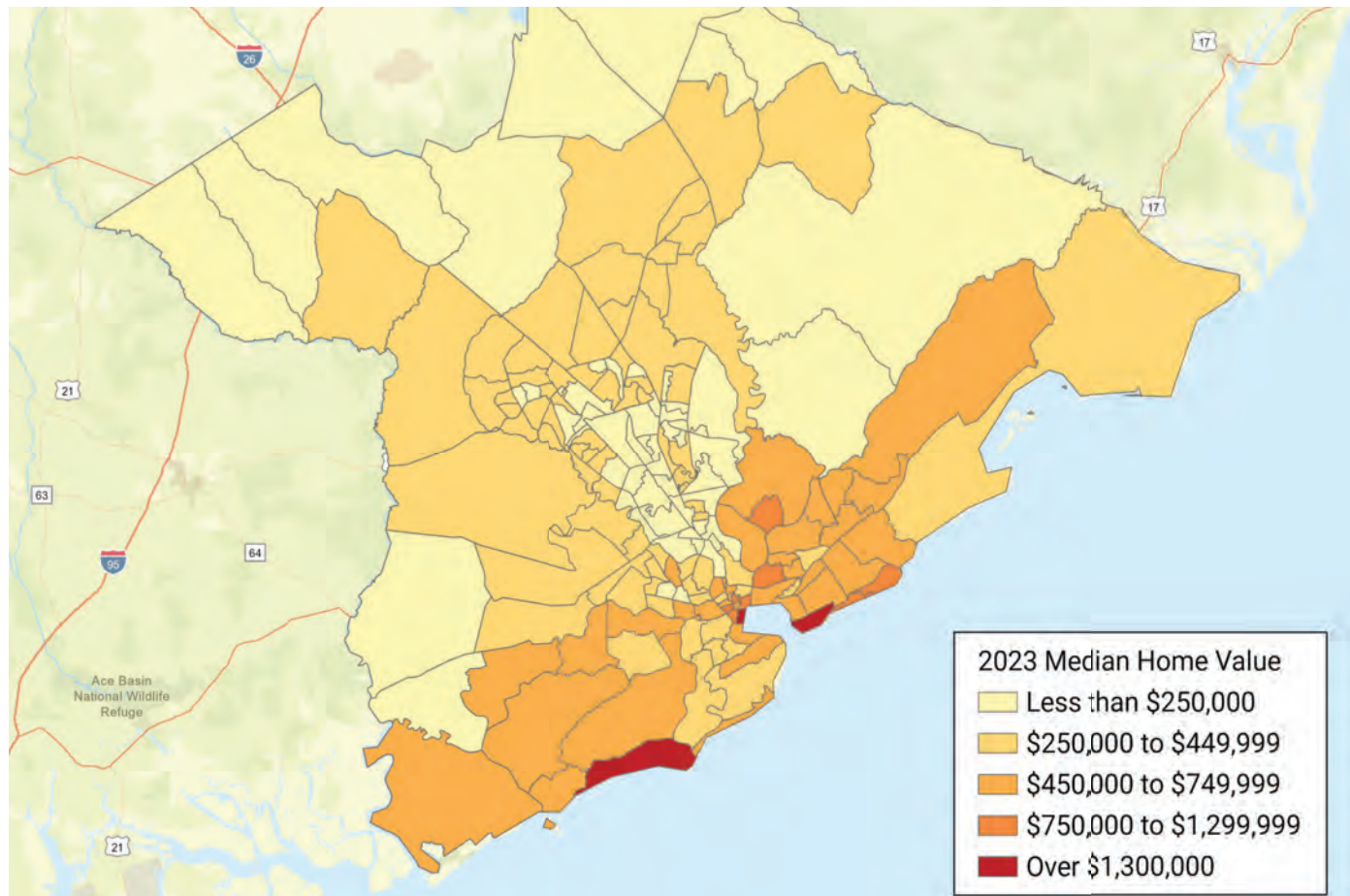
Data from the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics indicates that many of these commuters, especially those in entry-level Accommodation and Food Services and Retail

Trade jobs, are earning less than \$50,000 annually. Based on HUD’s guidelines, which consider households paying more than 30% of their income for housing as “cost-burdened,” these workers are most likely to afford homes valued under \$250,000.

This housing affordability issue is pushing workers to seek residences in more distant parts of the Charleston region where median home values better align with their budgets. The situation not only impacts the quality of life for workers due to long commutes but also has broader implications for the region’s transportation patterns and economic dynamics.

**Median Home Values, Charleston MSA, 2023**

Source: ESRI Business Analyst



HOUSING



**housing objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

*Continue Kiawah’s excellent reputation as a vibrant coastal village.*

**Objective H1**

Review housing data.

**Strategy H1.1**

Conduct a market analysis of Kiawah Island properties on a regular basis of two years.

**Objective H2**

Encourage the redevelopment of existing properties through Live with Nature principles to maintain Kiawah’s long-term market health, attractiveness, and environmental harmony.

**Strategy H2.1**

Create a comprehensive “Redevelopment Toolkit” for property owners, incorporating:

- Design guidelines that align with Live with Nature principles
- Streamlined permitting processes for approved redevelopment projects
- Best practices for sustainable and eco-friendly renovations.

**Objective H3**

Monitor the development of housing in adjacent communities.

**Strategy H3.1**

Support the development of workforce housing in the greater Charleston area.

- Provide endorsements, when necessary, to express verbal support of efforts by Charleston County and other area jurisdictions.

# 08



## landusenext

*Identify strategies for smart, sustainable, and controlled growth.*

### **Landuse**

*Considers existing and future land use by categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, mining, public and quasi-public, recreation, parks, open space, and vacant or undeveloped.*

### **Big Ideas**

*Annexation Policy  
Development Capacity*

### **Objectives**

*LU1 - Promote policies that enhance and preserve Kiawah's distinct, natural character.  
LU2 - Support Charleston County's Urban Growth Boundary.*

### **Overview**

The Town of Kiawah Island manages land development through municipal zoning and future land use codes, working closely with Kiawah Island Partners and Kiawah Island Golf Resort. As the island nears its planned capacity and the existing development agreement concludes, the Town must reevaluate its land use strategies to balance future development, conservation, and resilience.

This Land Use Element will outline Kiawah's unique development conditions and necessary actions for continued prosperity. It aims to guide policies that preserve the island's character while meeting evolving community needs, ensuring sustainable growth and long-term vitality and natural beauty while accommodating change and meeting the evolving needs of its community.

Through this comprehensive approach, we seek to ensure Kiawah Island's sustainable growth and long-term vitality.

LAND USE

**Kiawah Island Buildout Status\***

The Kiawah Island Buildout Status provides an overview of the current residential landscape and future development projections for the area. Currently, there are 4,392 developed residential units, predominantly single-family homes. The plan identifies 366 single-family residential developable properties and projects an additional 536 future residential units across various developments.

When combined with current units, this brings the total projected developed units to 5,294. The status also notes potential for further development in specific areas based on remaining developable land and allowed density

This snapshot illustrates Kiawah Island's current housing stock and its anticipated growth, balancing existing developments with future projects to meet evolving

<b>Current Residential Units</b>	
Single Family <sup>2</sup>	2972
Multifamily	1173
Proposed Units (*Projects under construction or site plan review)	247
<b>Developed Residential Units</b>	<b>4392</b>
<b>Undeveloped SFR Properties</b>	
Undeveloped Single Family Residential Lots	405
Less Vacant Conservation and Common Properties	-39
<b>Single Family Residential Developable Properties</b>	<b>366</b>
<b>Future Residential Development (Projection)</b>	
Kiawah Island Golf Resort Residential	420
Kiawah Partners Residential	22
Freshfields Village Residential	94
<b>Future Residential Units</b>	<b>536</b>
<b>Total Projected Developed Units</b>	<b>5294</b>
<b>DU Projection</b>	
(KIGR East Beach Ocean, East Beach Center, West Beach, Mingo Point, Ocean Course) based on acreage of remaining developable KIGR holdings and allowed density excludes program from guest rooms	
<sup>2</sup> Includes COO and SFR projects that are under construction with issued building permit	
*Proposed Units include projects based on submitted site plans under review or constructic	
Beachwalker Office Park	10
Marsh Point Residual	4
Beachwalker Park	104

\*The following development analysis uses Charleston County parcel data and Town of Kiawah Permitting data as of July 9 2024

**Conservation Through Annexation**

Annexation is a request by a private property owner or owners or government entity to incorporate their property into the service area and jurisdiction of the Town of Kiawah Island. The Town Council is responsible for approving all applications for proposed annexations and will execute these responsibilities by objectively weighing all relevant factors and making an informed decision on each proposed application for annexation. The policy and procedures for annexation are outlined in the Annexation Policy Plan and Procedures Manual.

Additionally, the Town should consider annexing property for the purpose of conservation. Preserving the natural landscape and maritime nature of the area is paramount to maintaining the vision of Kiawah Island.



**Zoning and Land Use**

The Planning Department uses tools like Zoning Ordinances and Land Use to manage and prescribe the type of development occurring on the Island. These tools, when used together, are powerful drivers of new construction, redevelopment, and preservation.

While this plan does not define or impact the Town of Kiawah Island's Zoning Ordinance, it uses it to enforce its Land Use policy.

**Zoning:** A regulatory tool for the management of present-day development. The current permissible uses of specific properties within a given jurisdiction.

**Land Use:** A regulatory tool for the management of future development. Defined in the *Comprehensive Plan* to govern future uses of swaths of properties.

**Comprehensive Plan Land Use Categories and Zoning Districts**

Land Use Categories	Zoning Districts
Low Density Residential	R-1, PR
Medium Density Residential	R-1, R-2, PR
High Density Residential	R-1, R-2, R-3, PR
Commercial	C, PR
Resort	RST-1, RST-2, PR
Community Support	CS, CS-2, PR
Active Recreation	PR
Open Space	KC, PR
Conservation	KC, PR
Planned Development (PD) can be incorporated into any zoning district, subject to criteria contained in the greater TOKI Zoning Ordinance.	

### Urban Growth Boundary Protection

The Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) is a crucial planning tool implemented by Charleston County to manage development and preserve the unique character of the area, including Kiawah Island and its surroundings. Evolving from the Charleston County 1999 Comprehensive Plan’s Suburban/Rural Area Edge, the UGB was formally recognized in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan Update. It serves as a critical demarcation between areas intended for urban development and those designated for rural or natural preservation.

The UGB is particularly significant for the broader region, including Johns Island, where it restricts urban/suburban development to approximately 20% of the island’s area, with the remaining 80% preserved for rural development. For Kiawah Island, a barrier island with a fragile and interconnected ecosystem, the UGB plays a role in maintaining the balance between development and conservation. It helps prevent urban sprawl from encroaching on the natural buffers that protect the island and contribute to its distinctive character.

The UGB ensures that the approach to Kiawah Island along the Betsy Kerrison Parkway retains its low-density character. Effective management of the UGB requires active collaboration between Kiawah Island, Charleston County, and neighboring communities such as Seabrook Island. This cooperation is important for creating consistent land use policies that reinforce the boundary’s effectiveness.

Looking to the future, it’s important to consider how sea-level rise might impact the areas surrounding the UGB, potentially necessitating reassessment to ensure its continued effectiveness. Education and public engagement are key components in maintaining the UGB’s integrity, with community outreach programs playing a vital role in promoting understanding and building stronger support for its preservation.

The UGB is more than just a line on a map; it’s a vital planning tool that helps preserve the natural beauty, ecological integrity, and quality of life that make the Charleston County area unique. It allows the region to thrive as a model of sustainable coastal development for generations to come.

### Future Land Use

Future land use guides the location and types of proposed development to align with Kiawah Island’s Land Use Planning/Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Commission and Council should ensure their recommendations and approvals adhere to this Plan’s Future Land Use Recommendations.

### Land Use Categories

#### Active Recreation and Open Space:

This category encourages development of community parks and recreational facilities while also preserving lands in their natural state, including those protected by conservation easements or under public/private ownership.

#### Conservation:

This category aims to protect and preserve natural resources within the Town’s limits, including highland areas surrounded by marsh or water, small islands, and fragile lands. It covers areas outside the critical line, which have been secured through preservation or conservation easements that significantly restrict development.

#### Low Density Residential:

This category promotes lower density single-family residential areas, with a maximum of three dwelling units per acre. Infill and redevelopment should respect the surrounding character and adhere to the Town’s density requirements.

#### Medium Density Residential:

This category promotes medium density single-family residential development, allowing up to six dwelling units per acre. It accommodates patio homes and zero lot line homes, unlike the Low Density Residential district. Examples include Inlet Cove and Night

Heron Cottages.

#### High Density Residential:

This category allows higher density residential development, up to 12 dwelling units per acre, including multifamily dwellings, duplexes, and townhouses. Examples include Shipwatch Villas and Duneside Villas.

#### Mixed Use:

This category promotes combined retail, service, commercial, office, and/or residential development within the same building or site. Freshfields is a typical example.

#### Resort:

This category promotes high-quality recreational structures for residents and guests, exemplified by The Sanctuary Hotel..

#### Commercial:

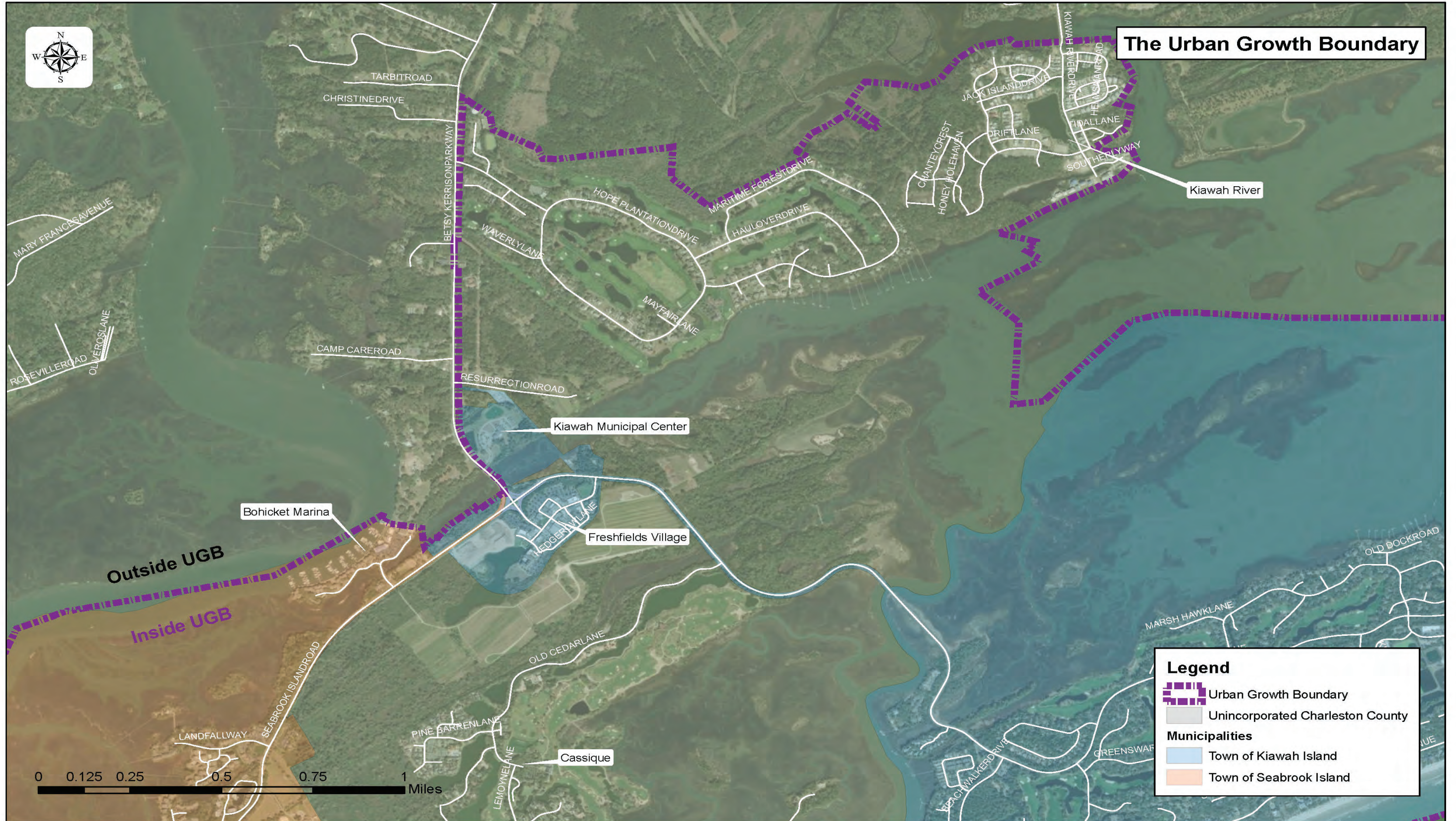
This category promotes small-scale commercial activity (specialty businesses, personal services, restaurants) complementing the community character, with a maximum floor area ratio of 0.2. Freshfields Retail Village is a typical example.

#### Civic and Institutional:

This category promotes community facilities and service buildings, both public and private, including churches, schools, utilities, and maintenance facilities. Maximum floor area ratio is 0.25. Examples include Town Hall, fire stations, and Kiawah Island Utilities Company.



Source: Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department

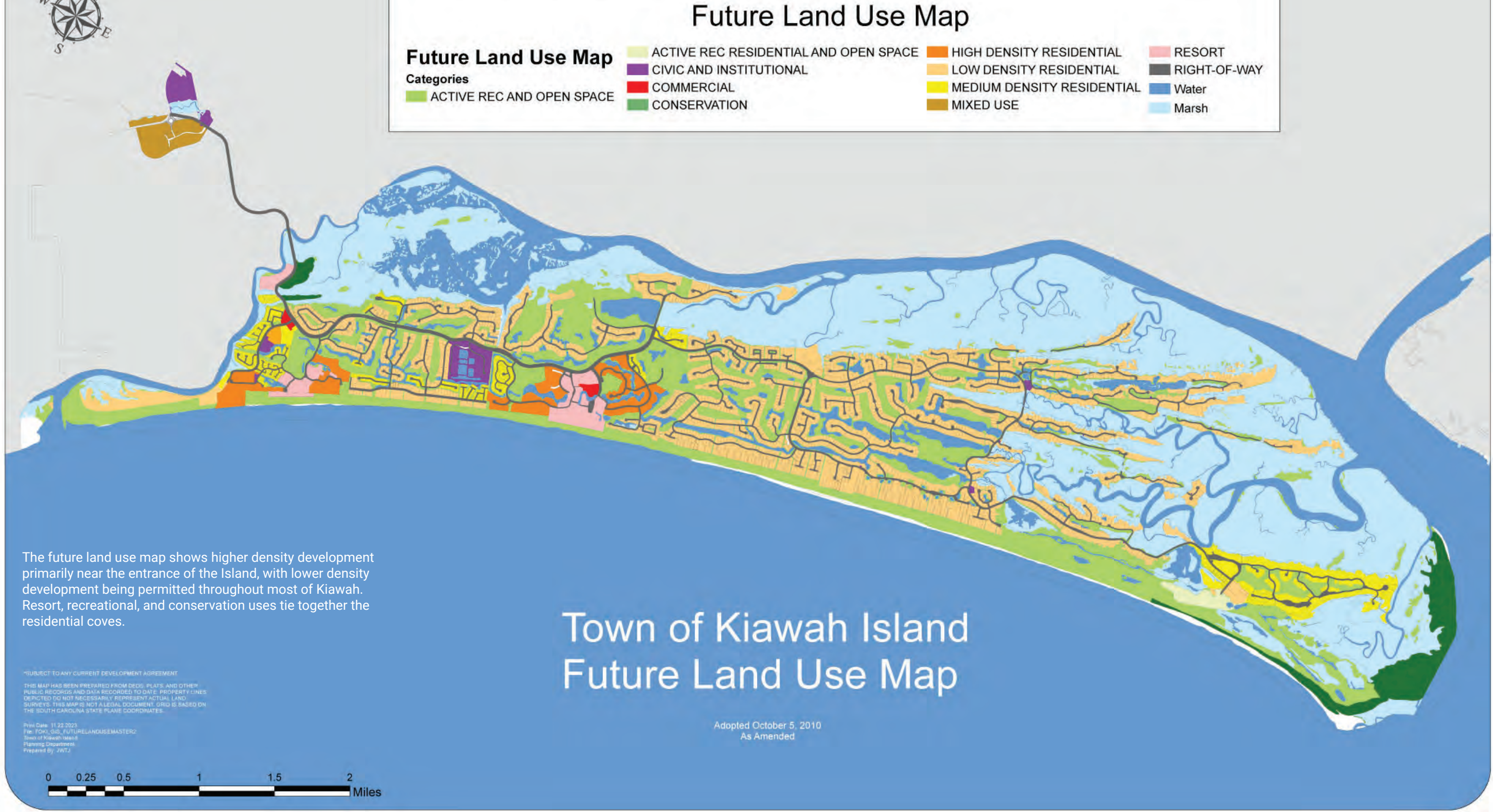


# Future Land Use Map

## Future Land Use Map

### Categories

- ACTIVE REC AND OPEN SPACE
- ACTIVE REC RESIDENTIAL AND OPEN SPACE
- CIVIC AND INSTITUTIONAL
- COMMERCIAL
- CONSERVATION
- HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- MIXED USE
- RESORT
- RIGHT-OF-WAY
- Water
- Marsh



The future land use map shows higher density development primarily near the entrance of the Island, with lower density development being permitted throughout most of Kiawah. Resort, recreational, and conservation uses tie together the residential coves.

# Town of Kiawah Island Future Land Use Map

Adopted October 5, 2010  
As Amended

\*SUBJECT TO ANY CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT  
THIS MAP HAS BEEN PREPARED FROM DEEDS, PLATS, AND OTHER PUBLIC RECORDS AND DATA RECORDED TO DATE. PROPERTY LINES DEPICTED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT ACTUAL LAND SURVEYS. THIS MAP IS NOT A LEGAL DOCUMENT. GRID IS BASED ON THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE PLANE COORDINATES.  
Print Date: 11/22/2023  
File: FDUO\_GIS\_FUTURELANDUSEMASTER2  
Town of Kiawah Island  
Planning Department  
Prepared By: JWT





**land use**  
**objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

*Identify strategies for smart, sustainable, and controlled growth.*

**Objective LU1**

Promote policies that balance growth with Kiawah's distinct character and natural environment.

**Strategy LU1.1**

Review and update land use and zoning designations to support sustainable development.

- Evaluate existing regulations guiding new construction and redevelopment.
- Consider amendments to existing codes that promote smart growth principles.
- Incorporate resiliency, environmental criteria, and economic sustainability into land use decisions.

**Strategy LU1.2**

Enhance regulatory tools to ensure controlled and sustainable growth.

- Develop zoning overlays that address specific area needs and environmental considerations.
- Create permitting incentives for development practices that minimize environmental impact while meeting community needs.

- Establish standards that balance preservation with responsible development.

**Strategy LU1.3**

Coordinate with stakeholders on comprehensive land use planning.

- Engage environmental experts, residents, developers, and business owners in planning processes.
- Assess existing regulations' outcomes relative to stakeholder goals and community vision.
- Facilitate discussions on balancing growth with preservation of Kiawah's character.

**Objective LU2**

Support Charleston County's Urban Growth Boundary.

**Strategy LU2.1**

Collaborate with Charleston County, Seabrook Island, and other neighboring jurisdictions to support the Urban Growth Boundary (UBG).

- Establish meetings with Charleston County to review and discuss the effectiveness of the UBG.
- Work with partners to identify and protect critical natural areas and wildlife corridors adjacent to the Urban Growth Boundary.



# 09



## transportationnext

*Provide safe mobility options for Kiawah residents, workers and guests.*

### Transportation

*Considers transportation facilities, including major road improvements, new road construction, transit projects, pedestrian and bicycle projects, and other elements of a transportation network.*

### Big Ideas

- Traffic Mitigation & Safety Improvements*
- Regional Connections*
- Integrated Mobility Strategy*

### Objectives

- T1 - Maintain the street network to provide safe and efficient routes.*
- T2 - Consider alternatives to address constraints of existing street network.*
- T3 - Promote safe, pleasant, and viable alternatives to vehicular on the Island.*
- T4 - Determine the need for shared transit options.*

### Overview

Kiawah Island’s street layout contributes to traffic management challenges. Most roads are privately owned, typically by the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA), while the Town maintains key public roads. The island’s extensive trail and bikeway network, while valuable, doesn’t yet provide a practical alternative for most travel needs. Recent collaborative efforts between KICA and the Town have addressed some traffic concerns, particularly at the Main Gate.

Regional connectivity is crucial, as many workers commute to Kiawah from outside the island. The transportation element considers ongoing regional improvement projects and their impact on island accessibility. It sets objectives to maintain efficient routes, explore alternatives to existing constraints, promote viable transportation options, and assess shared transit needs. By addressing these aspects, the plan aims to enhance mobility for Kiawah’s residents, workers, and guests while preserving the island’s character.

TRANSPORTATION



**Road Network**

Kiawah Island has a unique road network structure. Most roads on the Island are privately owned, usually by the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA), which owns and maintains approximately 60 miles of roads behind the gates. KICA’s engineering consultant assesses these roadways every 2-5 years to ensure proper maintenance.

The road network presents challenges, as only 16% of Kiawah’s minor roadways provide continuous travel options, concentrating vehicular congestion along major roadways. While the Town is not responsible for private road maintenance, it oversees the safety and welfare of citizens on all roads, requiring coordination with various entities to address traffic flow and congestion issues.

The Town is directly responsible for two key roads outside the front security gate: the Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive. The Parkway extends approximately 2.0 miles from the Betsy Kerrison Parkway to the front security gate. The Town also owns the roundabout connecting these parkways with the Seabrook Island Parkway

and the Freshfields shopping center entrance, completed in 2005.

To address network challenges and maintain key access routes, the Town has undertaken improvements to the Kiawah Island Parkway. A major project in 2009 included resurfacing and installing a bike path and trestle bridge. The Kiawah Island Parkway Improvement Project, completed in 2020, further enhanced the route with resurfacing, landscaping, stormwater management improvements, and safety upgrades such as raising the Mingo Point curve and adding paved shoulders.

Beachwalker Drive, though only a quarter-mile long, is also under Town responsibility. It leads to the County Beachwalker Park and public beach access, playing a crucial role in providing public beach access and requiring ongoing maintenance for safe and efficient travel.

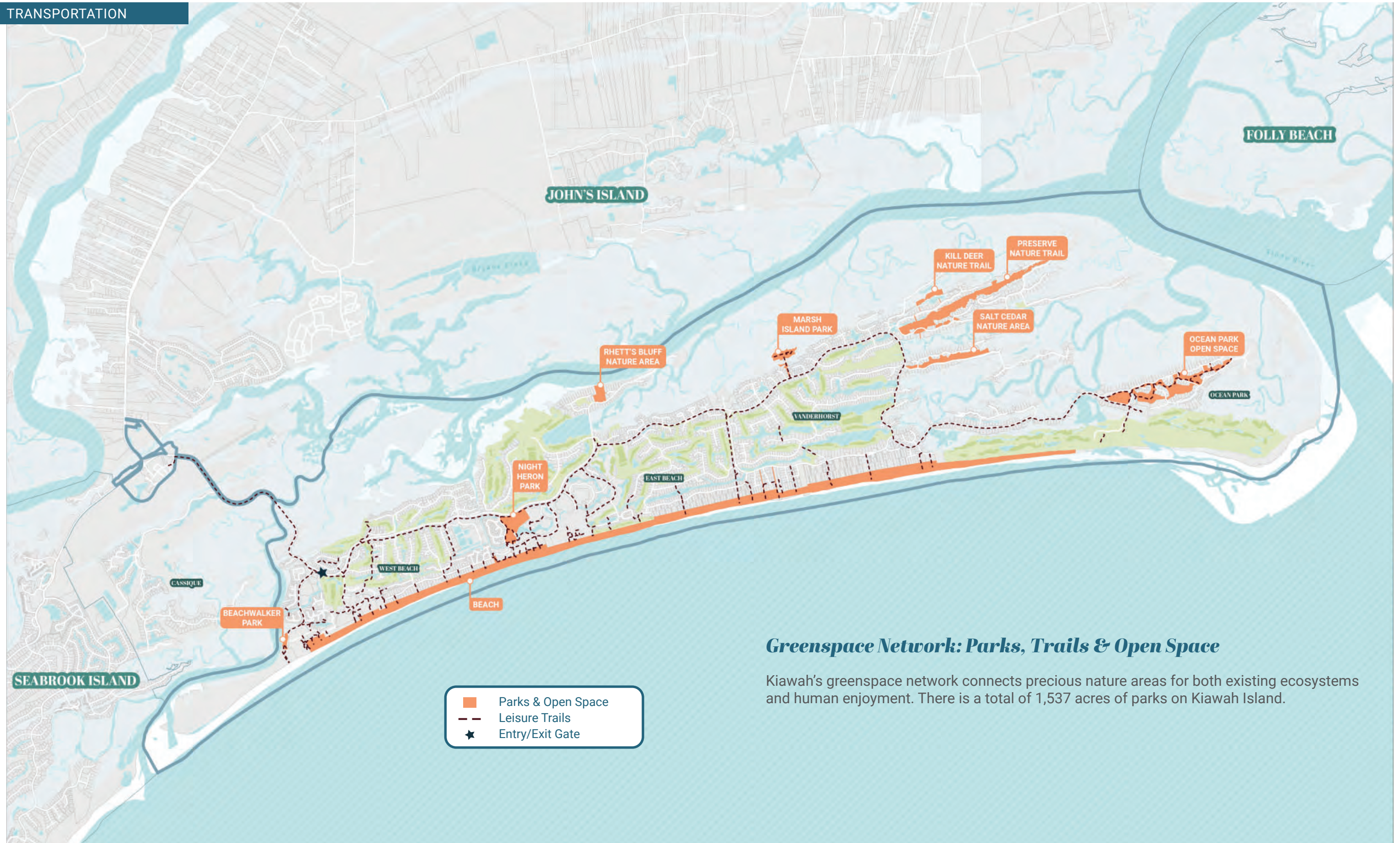
**Trails and Bikeways**

The Town of Kiawah Island recognizes the importance of a comprehensive leisure trail network in enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors while promoting environmental appreciation and alternative transportation. The island’s trail system is designed to provide beach access for both the public and private areas of Kiawah.

The Town of Kiawah Island owns and maintains approximately 3 miles of leisure trail from Beachwalker County Park to the Freshfields Village entrance. This trail provides a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists, connecting the public beach access at Beachwalker County Park to the island’s main entrance area. It serves as an important link in the island’s overall transportation and recreation network.

Behind the gate, KICA owns and maintains an extensive network of 19 miles of bike and pedestrian trails. These two systems connect, creating a seamless network that spans the entire island.

The comprehensive trail network on Kiawah Island serves as a vital component of the island’s infrastructure, supporting multiple strategic objectives. It promotes alternative transportation methods, reducing vehicular traffic and associated environmental impacts. The trails facilitate active lifestyles and outdoor recreation, contributing to the health and well-being of residents and visitors alike. Furthermore, the network enhances connectivity across the island, linking residential areas, recreational facilities, and natural spaces. By providing access to the island’s diverse ecosystems, the trails also play a crucial role in environmental education and appreciation. As Kiawah Island continues to develop, maintaining this trail system will remain a priority, ensuring that it continues to meet the evolving needs of the community while preserving the island’s natural beauty and ecological integrity.



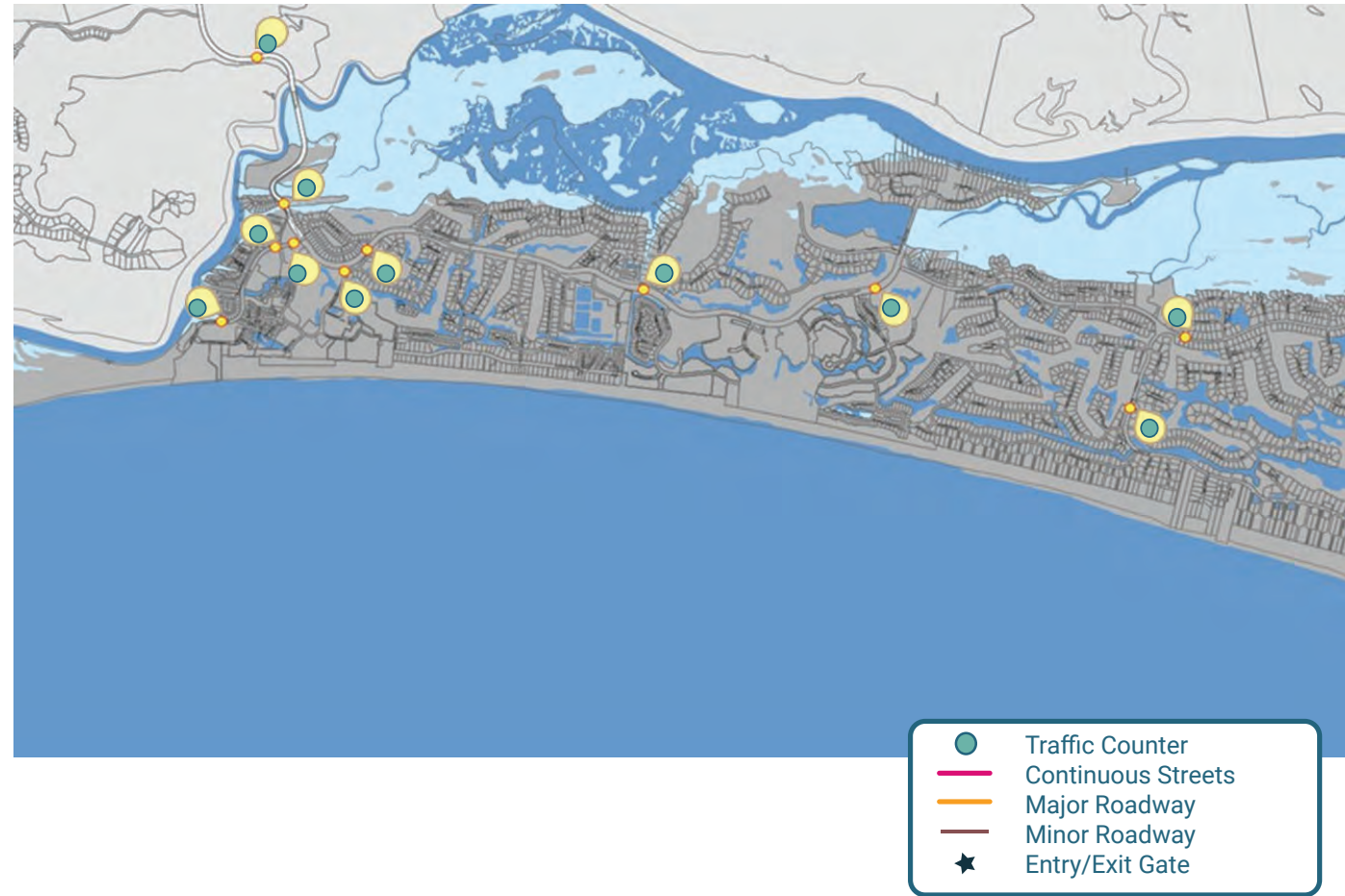
***Greenspace Network: Parks, Trails & Open Space***

Kiawah's greenspace network connects precious nature areas for both existing ecosystems and human enjoyment. There is a total of 1,537 acres of parks on Kiawah Island.

TRANSPORTATION

Traffic Counting Locations, Town of Kiawah Island, 2022

Source: Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update



Traffic Management and Evaluation

In 2023, KICA and the Town of Kiawah Island collaborated to address traffic concerns, focusing primarily on congestion at the Main Gate. Managed by KICA, the Main Gate experienced significant fluctuations in vehicle traffic over the past three years. In 2023, 2,269,320 vehicles passed through, an increase from 2,129,741 in 2022, but a decrease from 2,431,383 in 2021.

To alleviate congestion, several measures were implemented:

1. The Town stationed an employee at the Beachwalker Drive intersection during peak times to manage traffic flow.

2. Following a successful trial, the outbound stop sign at the Main Gate was removed, and the Beachwalker intersection traffic pattern was modified.
3. The Town completed improvements to the Beachwalker Drive/Kiawah Island Parkway intersection in summer of 2024.

These changes significantly reduced inbound traffic backups and virtually eliminated outbound congestion at the Main Gate.

The Town continues to monitor traffic along key routes, including **Kiawah Island Parkway, Beachwalker Drive, Flyway Drive, Governors Drive, and Ocean Course Drive**. Annual traffic

counts are conducted during three two-week periods in June, July, and August to assess traffic volumes and inform future planning decisions.

While the traffic mitigation thresholds from the expired Kiawah Island Partners development agreement are no longer enforceable, the Town has adopted them as benchmarks for considering additional mitigation strategies. These thresholds are:

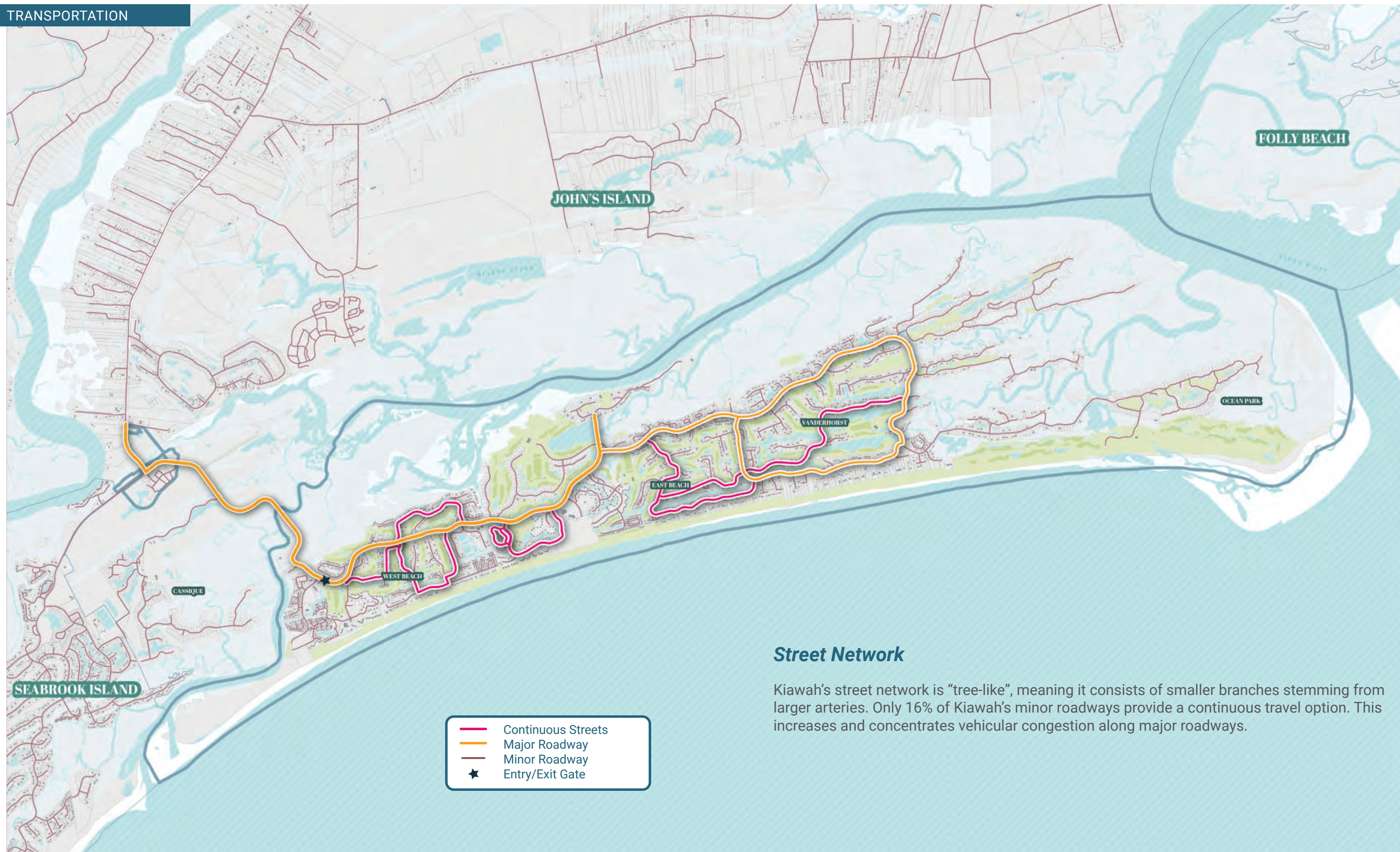
- Kiawah Island Parkway: Peak Hour Capacity 1,900 VPH, Near Capacity Traffic Volume 1,330 VPH
- Kiawah River Bridge: Peak Hour Capacity 1,700 VPH, Near Capacity Traffic Volume 1,190 VPH

Additional Traffic Management Efforts:

1. Security Patrols: KICA added a new patrol officer for 24-hour security and introduced a part-time bicycle patrol for leisure trails.
2. Gate Access: KICA manages both the Main Gate and Vanderhorst Gate, controlling access and administering passes
3. Infrastructure Improvements: KICA completed a two-year leisure trail widening project, expanding the Allee of Oaks trail along Flyway Drive to 10 feet wide.
4. Long-term Planning: The ongoing Kiawah Island Parkway Intersection and Corridor Study, initiated in 2021, analyzes intersection capacity along key routes, considering existing conditions (2021), short-term projections (2026), and long-term forecasts (2036).

These comprehensive efforts underscore KICA and the Town's commitment to managing traffic flow, enhancing safety, and improving the

overall transportation experience for Kiawah Island's residents and visitors.



### Street Network

Kiawah's street network is "tree-like", meaning it consists of smaller branches stemming from larger arteries. Only 16% of Kiawah's minor roadways provide a continuous travel option. This increases and concentrates vehicular congestion along major roadways.

- Continuous Streets
- Major Roadway
- Minor Roadway
- ★ Entry/Exit Gate

### Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway Improvements

The Town of Kiawah Island has implemented improvements to Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway in recent years, addressing traffic flow challenges. On Beachwalker Drive, the Town completed several improvements in 2021, including the addition of a stacking/right turn lane into Beachwalker County Park and the expansion of portions of the bike path to 8 feet wide. In August 2024, the Town secured a Charleston County Transportation Committee (CTC) grant to improve the upper part of the bike path, with these enhancements expected to be completed in 2025.

The Kiawah Island Parkway Intersection and Corridor Study, completed in August 2022 by Kimley-Horn, provided a comprehensive analysis of the Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive intersection. The study revealed operational challenges, with varying traffic patterns during AM and PM peak hours. Traffic count data from September 2021 showed AM peak hour volumes of 1,156 vehicles between 9:15 AM and 10:15 AM, with the heaviest eastbound flow of 599 vehicles during this period. The PM peak hour volumes reached 1,194 vehicles between 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM, with the heaviest westbound flow of 630 vehicles. The study projected potential failure of the westbound approach by 2026 due to anticipated increases in development traffic, particularly during PM peak hours.

In response to the study's findings, the Town implemented a series of strategic modifications in 2024. At the intersection, the westbound through lane was converted to free-flow, and the westbound left-turn lane was channelized with stop sign control. These changes were designed to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion during peak hours. At the front gate, a new landscape island was

installed to enhance both aesthetics and traffic management. The entire area underwent restriping to create a merge lane, significantly improving traffic storage capacity. Although initial plans had included the addition of a right turn lane, this particular improvement was not implemented due to complications with utility infrastructure and land acquisition requirements.

To further manage traffic flow, the Town has stationed a dedicated employee at the intersection during AM and PM peak times. These strategic modifications are expected to help with delays at the intersection and improve overall traffic flow.

The Town of Kiawah Island remains committed to monitoring traffic patterns and evaluating potential improvements at the Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway intersection. These ongoing efforts demonstrate the Town's dedication to addressing evolving traffic needs and ensuring efficient transportation for residents and visitors alike.



Kiawah Island Parkway Channelized Left Turn Improvements

### ***Kiawah Island Parkway and Kiawah Beach Drive Improvements***

In December 2021, Kimley-Horn completed a study for the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) focusing on the intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Kiawah Beach Drive. This study aimed to improve safety and efficiency for all users, including drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists

The study revealed several key findings. Observations showed vehicles often exceeding the speed limit. Areas with overgrown vegetation were found to obstruct visibility, particularly affecting drivers' ability to see pedestrians and cyclists. The study also projected traffic volumes for 2026, accounting for potential developments and an assumed annual traffic growth rate.

Based on the traffic study findings, Kimley-Horn, the consulting firm, explored various design alternatives to potentially improve traffic flow and safety at this intersection. Among these options, they proposed a roundabout as a possible solution, citing potential benefits in traffic management and safety enhancement for all users. It's important to note that this recommendation is currently just a suggestion from Kimley-Horn. The Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) has not approved this proposal, and no final decisions have been made regarding any changes to the intersection.

Additional recommendations included trimming overgrown vegetation to improve visibility at the intersection and implementing measures to better manage vehicle speeds and enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Understanding the different ownership and jurisdictions of the roads is crucial when considering these improvements. Kiawah Island Parkway (KIP), from the roundabout at Freshfields to the front gate, is owned and maintained by the Town of Kiawah Island, making it a public road. In contrast, Kiawah Beach Drive (KBD) is owned and maintained by the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) and is considered a private road, as it is located behind the first security gate of the island. This distinction in ownership and accessibility significantly impacts decision-making processes for road improvements, requiring coordination between the Town and KICA for comprehensive traffic management solutions.

### ***Regional Connections***

The condition of Johns Island roads is critical to the functioning of Kiawah Island, serving as essential arteries for daily commutes. Workers, including contractors, sub-contractors, landscape and maintenance personnel, hospitality workers, and others, rely heavily on these routes. Census data reveals that nearly three-quarters of all workers on Kiawah Island travel more than 25 miles to reach their jobs, underscoring the need for safe, reliable routes extending well beyond the Town's jurisdiction.

While not a direct objective of Kiawah Island, the Mark Clark Extension project has been viewed by some as a potential solution to address Johns Island congestion. The purpose of this project is to increase the capacity of the regional transportation system, improve safety, and enhance mobility to and from the West Ashley, Johns Island, and James Island areas of the Charleston metropolitan area. This project could potentially impact traffic flow to and from Kiawah and Seabrook Islands.

These roads are also vital for Kiawah residents and visitors traveling to and from Charleston and other off-island destinations. Regular travel between Kiawah Island and the area's airports is common. Measured from the front gate on Kiawah Island, Charleston International Airport (CHS) is just over 30 miles away, while Charleston Executive Airport (JZI) is 14 miles away.

Charleston International Airport has significantly expanded its services in recent years, now boasting 13 carriers operating flights on 69 nonstop routes to various destinations across the country. This

expansion has greatly enhanced connectivity for Kiawah Island residents and visitors.

Charleston Executive Airport (JZI), located approximately 14 miles from Kiawah Island, serves as a convenient alternative for private and corporate aviation needs. The airport features two runways, ample hangar space, and services tailored to general aviation. JZI plays a role for residents and visitors who prefer the flexibility and convenience of private air travel. It is equipped with facilities to accommodate a range of aircraft, from small private planes to larger corporate jets. The airport's proximity to Kiawah Island makes it an attractive option for those seeking quick and efficient access to the island.

Multiple transportation options are available for reaching Kiawah Island. In addition to personal vehicles, visitors and residents can utilize rideshare services and alternative transportation methods. Notably, Uber has secured an access agreement through the gates with KICA, facilitating easier access to the island.

The importance of these regional connections highlights the need for ongoing collaboration between Kiawah Island and surrounding communities. This collaboration is essential to ensure safe, efficient transportation infrastructure that meets the needs of residents, workers, and visitors alike. As the region continues to grow and evolve, maintaining and improving these connections will be crucial for Kiawah Island's continued accessibility and prosperity.



Source: "Progress on preserving trees, but we're not out of the woods", *The Post and Courier*

### Main Road Corridor Project: Improving Access to Johns Island

In response to the growing transportation challenges on Johns Island, Charleston County has developed a comprehensive plan that should address traffic congestion and improve accessibility. This plan, approved by the Charleston County Council in 2018, represents a step towards enhancing the island's infrastructure and addressing the needs of its rapidly expanding population.

#### The Main Road Corridor Project

It is a phased, three-segment approach designed to create more efficient access points to and from Johns Island. This project has approximately 15 miles of improvements, from Bees Ferry Road to Betsy Kerrison Parkway. Key components of the project include:

1. Improvement of the intersection at US 17 and Main Road
2. Extensive enhancements along Main Road
3. Implementation of improved drainage systems
4. Addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities
5. Widening of the road to accommodate increased traffic flow

These comprehensive improvements aim to address both current congestion issues and anticipate future traffic needs as the area continues to grow.

#### Impact on Kiawah Island

While not directly on Kiawah Island, these improvements are expected to have a significant positive impact on residents, workers, and visitors traveling to and from Kiawah. By enhancing the main arteries leading to the island, the project should reduce travel times, improve safety, and provide more reliable access during both peak traffic periods and emergency situations.

#### Looking Forward

As the project progresses, it's crucial for Kiawah Island stakeholders to stay informed and engaged. The improvements may influence future planning decisions and infrastructure investments on Kiawah itself. By remaining involved, Kiawah Island can ensure its needs are considered as the regional transportation network evolves.

### Road Conditions and Land Use

Kiawah Island's unique geography and development pattern present distinct challenges and opportunities for integrating transportation and land use planning. As a barrier island with limited access points and a delicate ecosystem, Kiawah requires thoughtful strategies that balance accessibility, environmental preservation, and quality of life for both residents and visitors. The following sections outline a comprehensive approach to roads and land use integration, addressing current challenges and future needs while preserving the island's character. These strategies aim to optimize traffic flow, enhance mobility options, and align transportation infrastructure with sustainable land use practices, ensuring Kiawah Island's long-term vitality and resilience.

#### 1. Current Transportation Landscape

Kiawah Island's transportation infrastructure is characterized by limited access points, which presents unique challenges for traffic management. The island is served by Kiawah Island Parkway, the main artery connecting the island to the mainland. Beachwalker Drive, branching off from the Parkway, provides the sole access to the island's public beach. This limited road network creates a bottleneck effect, particularly during peak tourist seasons and morning and afternoon when contractors are coming on or leaving the island.

#### 2. Traffic Flow Optimization

Addressing the island's traffic congestion requires a multi-faceted approach. Implementing turbo or normal roundabouts at key intersections along Kiawah Island Parkway can help regulate traffic flow more efficiently. Relocating KICA's gate office to a more suitable location could help reduce

traffic back up at the intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive. Additionally, developing a real-time traffic monitoring system for the Parkway would provide valuable data for both planners and residents, allowing for more informed decision-making.

#### 3. Access Point Enhancement

The intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive is a critical juncture that often experiences heavy congestion. Redesigning this intersection to improve flow is essential. One potential solution is the implementation of a roundabout, which could reduce congestion and improve safety. Any redesign should consider not only vehicular traffic but also accommodate pedestrians and cyclists safely.

#### 4. Public Beach Access

Managing access to the public beach is crucial for mitigating traffic issues. While Charleston County Park has implemented a reservation system for public beach parking during peak seasons more parking management ideas should be explored such as implementing a smart parking system.

#### 5. Alternative Transportation Promotion

In staying with the Town's Kiawah Go Green initiative by implementing an island-wide electric shuttle system could provide an eco-friendly alternative for getting around the island, reducing the number of car trips made by both residents and visitors.

#### 6. Infrastructure Resilience

Identify and protect critical road infrastructure against environmental threats, such as flooding and erosion, is crucial for maintaining access to the island.

TRANSPORTATION



**transportation objectives and strategies**

**7. Technology Integration for Traffic Management**

Leveraging technology can greatly enhance traffic management efforts. Developing a Kiawah Island traffic app to provide real-time updates can help residents and visitors plan their trips to avoid peak congestion times. This technological solutions should be user-friendly and widely promoted to ensure maximum adoption and effectiveness.

**8. Seasonal and KICA Traffic Management Strategies**

To address Kiawah Island’s significant seasonal variations and daily congestion, develop a comprehensive traffic management plan. KICA should implement staggered check-ins for visitors and guests during peak times. This includes managing Saturday short-term guest passes through the main gate. By adopting these flexible strategies, the island can work towards improving traffic flow year-round, aiming to better accommodate both peak tourist seasons and off-season patterns.

**9. Regional Coordination and Long-term Planning**

Traffic issues on Kiawah Island are not isolated and require coordination with neighboring areas. Working with Charleston County to improve road conditions leading to Kiawah Island can help manage traffic before it reaches the island. Coordinating with Seabrook Island on shared traffic management strategies can lead to more comprehensive solutions. For long-term planning, conducting regular traffic studies to inform future land use decisions. Additionally, the Town should consider acquisition of land along the Parkway for preservation or passive public parks.

**10. Road Network Expansion**

Explore opportunities to create more

interconnecting roads throughout Kiawah Island. This could help distribute traffic more evenly and provide alternative routes during peak times or emergencies.

**11. Kiawah Island Parkway Enhancement and Resiliency**

Consider strategic improvements to the Kiawah Island Parkway, the main artery leading to the front gate, focusing on both capacity and resilience. Prioritize enhancing the parkway’s resilience to environmental factors such as flooding and sea-level rise. This could involve raising the elevation of the parkway leading to the first gate, incorporating permeable surfaces, and improving drainage systems. These measures would help ensure continued access to the island during extreme weather events while potentially alleviating traffic issues through improved road conditions. For long-term planning, conduct regular traffic studies to inform future land use decisions. While widening the road could accommodate increased traffic flow, it would be a costly endeavor requiring bridge expansion and state regulatory approvals, making it a less favorable option.

**12. Evacuation Planning**

Work with a traffic engineer to develop and implement a reverse lane policy for evacuations. This would allow for more efficient outbound traffic flow during emergency situations by temporarily converting inbound lanes to outbound lanes. Conduct regular drills and simulations to ensure the effectiveness of this plan and familiarize residents with evacuation procedures.

**GOAL:**

*Reduce congestion and improve traffic efficiency.*

**Objective T1**

Improve regional connectivity and access to Kiawah Island.

**Strategy T1.1**

Actively participate in regional transportation planning efforts, particularly those affecting Johns Island and routes to Charleston.

**Strategy T1.2**

Advocate for improvements to the Main Road Corridor Project that benefit Kiawah Island residents and visitors.

**Strategy T1.3**

Explore the potential for water-based transportation options, such as ferry services, to diversify access routes to the island.

**Objective T2**

Enhance transportation infrastructure resilience and sustainability.

**Strategy T2.1**

Encourage the adoption of electric vehicles by installing charging stations at key locations around the island.

**Objective T3**

Enhance Kiawah Island’s transportation network through data-driven planning and strategic improvements to meet current and future community needs for mobility, safety, and sustainability.

**Strategy T3.1**

Regularly conduct traffic studies and analyze intersection capacity along critical routes, focusing on key areas like the KICA front gate and major intersections. Consider current conditions, 5-year projections, and 15-year forecasts to identify congestion points and safety hazards.

**Strategy T3.2**

Explore the feasibility of implementing strategic improvements based on study results, such as a roundabout at the Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive intersection, to improve traffic flow and safety.

**Objective T4**

Develop and implement shared transit solutions to reduce individual vehicle usage and enhance sustainable mobility on Kiawah Island.

**Strategy T4.1**

Conduct a feasibility study for implementing a shared transit system, such as electric shuttles or on-demand services, focusing on key routes and destinations within the island.

**Strategy T4.2**

Design and launch a pilot program for a shared transit service, evaluating its effectiveness in reducing traffic congestion and improving mobility for residents and visitors.

# 10



# priority investmentsnext

*Strategically invest in Kiawah’s critical and most at-risk infrastructure.*

**Priority Investment**

*Analyzes the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the next ten years and recommends the projects for expenditure of those funds during the next ten years for needed public infrastructure and facilities.*

**Big Ideas**

*Capital Improvement Plan  
Infrastructure Assessments*

**Objectives**

- PI1 - Regularly update and circulate the Capital Improvement Plan.*
- PI2 - Establish a process for regular infrastructure assessments.*
- PI3 - Increase transparency of infrastructure regulatory and development processes.*
- PI4 - Secure funding and support for critical infrastructure improvements.*

**Overview**

The purpose of this section of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan is to focus investment on the priorities identified as critical to the resiliency of Kiawah Island. Currently, it outlines the development of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to coordinate prioritization, planning, and budgeting for these priorities over a ten-year period. The plan emphasizes the importance of maintaining resilience through emergency management, hazard mitigation, natural resource protection, and infrastructure maintenance. It also stresses the need for coordination with adjacent municipalities, public service districts, and other relevant entities in planning and executing public projects.

To enhance this section’s effectiveness, it needs to incorporate a more detailed analysis of likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities over the next decade. This analysis should be coupled with specific recommendations for projects and expenditures, prioritizing critical and at-risk infrastructure. New content should include a comprehensive assessment of potential funding sources, from local accommodations taxes to federal grants, and outline key projects

PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

**Capital Improvement Plan**

The Town of Kiawah Island’s fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. Town Council adopts a budget each year to allocate funds for the many programs, services, and projects provided for residents and visitors.

The objective of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is to plan and coordinate the financial resources necessary to prioritize investment. The CIP will cover a ten-year period and allow for the following:

- Facilitates coordination between capital needs and the operating budgets.
- Enhances the community’s ability to obtain a credit rating in the future and avoid sudden changes in any potential future debt service requirements.
- Identifies the most economical means of financing capital projects.
- Increases opportunities for obtaining federal and state aid.
- Relates public facilities to other public and private development and redevelopment policies and plans.
- Focuses attention on community objectives and fiscal capacity.
- Keeps the public informed about future needs and projects.
- Allows local government to reduce duplication.
- Encourages careful project planning and design to avoid costly mistakes and help the community reach its desired goals.

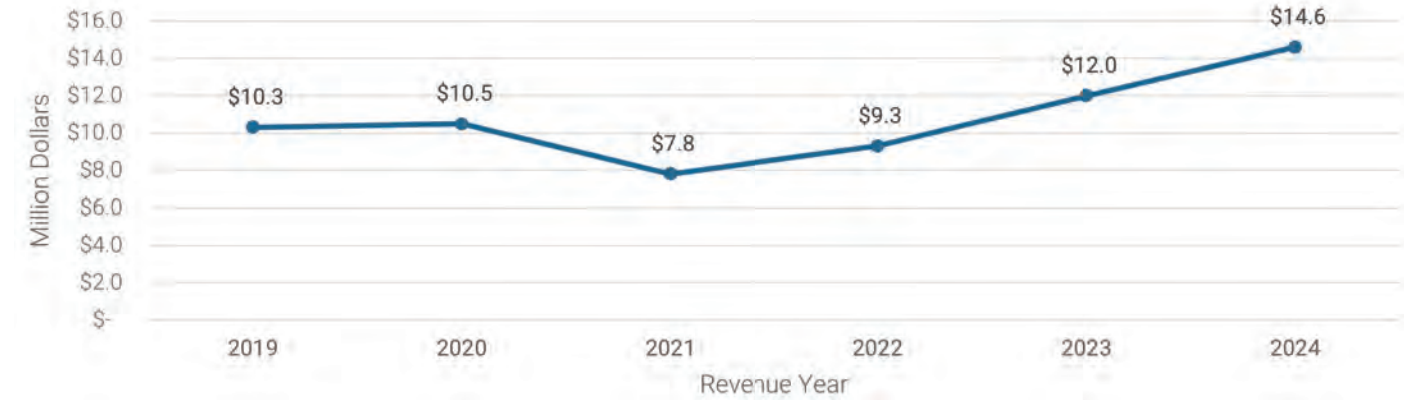
The CIP will be implemented by Town Council during the annual budget process and will involve the evaluation of projected fund balances as compared to the 10 year funding requirements for each priority. After adoption of the 10-year plan, the Town should review the progress of the plan annually, adjust or modify and incorporate recommendations as deemed appropriate.

The Town will also seek to invest funds and match their maturities so that they coincide with the planned time frame for the construction or renovation of priority investments as outlined in the CIP.

As such, the CIP will be a dynamic document that will chart the planning and funding for major capital projects or priorities within the community. Town Council should receive quarterly financial reporting for the CIP and discuss these findings in open session during Town Council or Ways & Means Committee meetings.

**Fund Balance Growth by Year**

Source: "Budget", Town of Kiawah Island



The Town's Municipal Center Complex

### Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Funding Opportunities

The Town of Kiawah Island maintains a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to manage and fund major capital projects, as outlined in the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. The CIP is a part of the Town’s financial planning process, designed to coordinate the financing of major capital projects and purchases over time.

**CIP Structure and Process:**

The CIP is implemented by the Town Council during the annual budget process, which involves evaluating projected fund balances against long-term funding requirements for each priority. After adoption, the Town reviews the plan’s progress annually, making adjustments and modifications as needed.

**Transparency and Accountability:**

To maintain transparency, the Town Council receives quarterly financial reports on the CIP, which are discussed in open sessions during Town Council or Ways & Means Committee meetings.

**Local Funding:**

As of the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024, the Town’s financial position for capital improvements and emergency preparedness was as follows:

- Capital Fund Balance: \$6,761,183  
This fund is committed for future capital projects, allowing the Town to plan and execute significant infrastructure improvements and community enhancements.
- Emergency Fund Balance: \$2,613,916  
This fund is designated for unanticipated expenditures of an emergency nature and disaster recovery, demonstrating the Town’s commitment to financial resilience in the

face of potential crises.

These dedicated funds, totaling \$9,375,099, reflect the Town’s strategic approach to financial management, ensuring resources are available for both planned capital improvements and unforeseen emergencies.

**State Funding Opportunities:**

The Town explores various state-level funding sources, including:

- South Carolina Department of Transportation grants for road improvements
- South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism grants for recreational facilities
- South Carolina Office of Resilience funding for environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness projects
- Charleston County C-Funds for local transportation projects

**Federal Funding Opportunities:**

Potential federal funding sources include:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants for hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers funding for coastal projects
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grants for coastal resilience initiatives
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants for water infrastructure improvements

**Additional Funding Avenues:**

The Town also considers:

- Public-private partnerships for projects benefiting both the community and local businesses
- Grants from private foundations and non-profit organizations, especially for environmental conservation, community development, and cultural initiatives
- Regional funding through the BCDGOG and Berkley Electric Cooperative

**Grant Management:**

To maximize these funding opportunities, the Town maintains a proactive approach to grant writing and management, dedicating staff resources to researching and applying for relevant grants, and ensuring compliance with all grant requirements.

**Future Enhancements:**

Opportunities to further enhance the CIP process include:

- Developing more detailed project prioritization criteria
- Increasing public engagement in the CIP process
- Integrating the CIP more closely with other Town plans
- Providing more detailed breakdowns of planned projects and their funding sources
- Establishing performance metrics to evaluate the success of completed capital projects

By leveraging this diverse array of funding sources and continually refining its CIP process, the Town of Kiawah Island aims to

implement a robust Capital Improvement Plan that ensures strategic, sustainable investments in infrastructure and community amenities, aligned with the long-term vision for the island’s development and preservation. The combination of dedicated local funds, state and federal grant opportunities, and innovative funding approaches positions the Town to effectively address both its planned improvements and potential unforeseen challenges.

## PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

**Maintaining Resiliency**

The Town of Kiawah Island prioritizes investing towards improvements that will ensure the health and success of Kiawah Island's future. To ensure adequate measures are taken, it is recommended that the Town of Kiawah Island conducts and publishes an Infrastructure Assessment and Report every 5 years. The report would cover strategies and investments related to maintaining the following areas:

**Emergency Management:**

As a coastal community on a barrier island, the Town recognizes emergency management and infrastructure associated with it to be of critical importance. The risk of severe hurricanes and tidal flooding, combined with the remote location of the Island, make coastal flooding a double threat to Kiawah Island and its population.

To prioritize funding for emergency management, the Town will conduct reasonable assessments of the Town's owned infrastructure and identify its replacement costs. Next, the Town will estimate the clean up or recovery costs associated with restoring the Island to its pre-emergency condition. Lastly, the costs for the resources needed to demonstrate readiness and responsiveness should be determined. These estimates should be the basis of a target budget for an emergency preparedness component of the Capital Improvement Plan.

Developing cost estimates should be a collaborative effort among Island entities, the State's Budget & Control Board, private contractors, and other public partners like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Charleston County. This effort should also involve the Town's financial advisors (bankers, accountants, etc.) to

measure the financial strength of the Town as compared to the inherent risk of a natural disaster or other emergency. The Town of Kiawah Island is well aware of the need for funding to respond to a natural disaster and has positioned itself to be fiscally conservative in other areas as a response.

**Hazard Mitigation:**

The Town of Kiawah Island prioritizes hazard mitigation through sustained planning to reduce long-term risks to its people, assets, economy, and community. Since adopting the Charleston Regional Mitigation Plan in 2004, the Town has maintained a high Community Rating System (CRS), resulting in lower insurance costs for residents. The Town annually updates its Hazard Mitigation Action Plan, focusing primarily on flooding, but recognizing the need to address other hazards such as hurricanes, tornados, fires, earthquakes, explosions, and erosion.

Integrated into the Town's Priority Investment Element, hazard mitigation planning is crucial for identifying, prioritizing, and protecting critical community assets including housing, economy, cultural resources, and transportation. This integration helps the Town plan, budget, and justify improvements to mitigate various hazards effectively. The success of this plan relies on regular reviews and collaborative efforts among island entities, including the St. John's Fire District and Charleston County Sheriff's Department.

By maintaining an up-to-date and comprehensive hazard mitigation strategy, Kiawah Island enhances its resilience and ability to protect its unique coastal community against a wide range of potential threats.

**Natural Resources:**

The most critical priority investment for the beach is the ability to recover from damage resulting from a major storm. In the event of such a storm, the beach could sustain significant damage that could take years to recover from naturally. As the beach is a major contributor to the economy of the Town of Kiawah Island and Charleston County, it is important that it be restored as soon as reasonably possible. Every effort should be made to recognize and budget provisionally for the expense of restoring the Kiawah Island beach to its pre-storm event condition.

Over the past twenty years, the Town has held reserves in the Local Accommodations Tax Fund, primarily for preserving the 10-mile Kiawah Island beach. In 2006, these funds were utilized to complete a major beach restoration project totaling \$3.6 million. As a continuation of the East End Beach project completed in 2006, the Town continues to monitor the results of this project. The Town spent roughly \$115,000 to fully monitor the beach and the wildlife affected by the 2006 restoration project. This monitoring program continued until 2014. After the program was completed, The Town found that the eastern end of Kiawah Island had experienced severe erosion during 2014 and 2015, specifically the land that was adjacent to the Ocean Course driving range. In May of 2015, the Town moved approximately 100,000 cubic yards of sand to create a new half mile inlet to the east. This project was completed in July of 2015 and cost the Town approximately \$530,000. The objective of the beach management and maintenance priority is to provide continuous monitoring of beach erosion or accretion rates, dune formation or other shoreline changes.

The results of this ongoing observation should be taken into consideration as part of the planning process and used to identify future

needs. Currently, these observations are conducted by Dr. Kana of Coastal Science and Engineering and the results are incorporated in the State mandated Beach Management Plan. As part of the coordination efforts, priorities established should be consistent with the existing *Beach Management Plan*.

*The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan*  
The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan (CMMP), launched by the Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department in April 2022, represents the first document to focus solely on the marsh and consolidate various tools for its management. This planning effort synthesizes management perspectives and tools based on science, community input, policy, and restoration techniques, as suggested in previous studies and plans for Kiawah. The CMMP is envisioned as a living document to be revisited every five years, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness.

The plan outlines proposals for restoring and protecting the wetlands on Kiawah Island, specifically targeting marsh loss and erosion areas. It is structured around four main goals: Monitor, Protect, Engage, and Restore. The plan recommends establishing a five-year monitoring program to track marsh health indicators, suggests regulatory actions to protect the marsh, emphasizes public education and outreach, and outlines various restoration techniques such as living shorelines and oyster reef construction. To implement these strategies effectively, the plan recommends creating a Kiawah Island Inter-Entity Executive Committee (KIIEEC) to coordinate efforts among various stakeholders.

Funding is a critical component of the CMMP. The plan suggests several potential funding sources, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the South Carolina Office of Resilience. Additionally, it proposes the creation of a town marsh mitigation fund as an ongoing source of match funding when

PRIORITY INVESTMENTS



required by federal, state, or private grant entities. This fund could play a crucial role in leveraging external funding opportunities. The CMMP emphasizes the multiple benefits of healthy marshes, including combating the effects of erosion and flooding, improving water quality, providing essential habitats for wildlife, and serving as nursery grounds for marine life. By implementing this comprehensive approach, Kiawah Island aims to ensure the long-term health and resilience of its valuable marsh ecosystems..

**Other Infrastructure:**

As a priority investment, the Town’s roads and bridge should be assigned useful lives and

maintenance schedules tied to these useful lives. Maintenance should include establishing base line or current condition of the roadway, bridge, curb cuts and associated bike paths. Budget funding should be linked to coincide with the replacement schedules.

The water and wastewater service to Kiawah Island is owned and operated by the Kiawah Island Utility (KIU) Company. The original water lines servicing the Island require regular maintenance. A new secondary waterline for Kiawah Island was installed to improve services to the island.

As a priority investment, the Town will seek to work with the Kiawah Island Utility Company to



identify funding sources when replacement of the current system is required. The objective is not to manage the responsibility of another entity, but rather to recognize the potential risk of system damage since it is the sole water and sewer service supplier for the Island. Ideally, the system should be evaluated to assure that it will be adequate and resilient to meet the future needs of Kiawah as the community continues to grow. This effort would serve as a joint public/private partnership for the health and welfare of the residents.

The Town will seek to identify, locate, and log all storm drains on Town-owned streets or easements. Their current condition will be evaluated upon identification and

systematically scheduled for maintenance based on their projected useful lives. Kiawah Island Community Association owns and maintain more than 40 miles of underground pipe that provide drainage for the entire Island. Proactive maintenance or replacement to ensure that they are in working order and do not jeopardize functionality of the overall storm water network managed by the KICA.

The Town’s Municipal Center Complex is the single largest facility owned by the Town of Kiawah Island. The Municipal Center was built in 2015 and includes approximately 18,600 SF of conditioned space housing around 30 employees plus a 4-bay garage.



## priority investments objectives and strategies

### GOAL:

*Strategically invest in Kiawah’s critical and most at-risk infrastructure.*

#### Objective PI1

Regularly update and share a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

##### Strategy PI1.1

Create, publish, and maintain a CIP that prioritizes municipal projects and distributes funds effectively.

- Coordinate with stakeholders to ensure the CIP reflects the needs of all member organizations and identifies shared resource opportunities.

#### Objective PI2

Establish a process for regular infrastructure and marsh assessments.

##### Strategy PI2.1

Conduct and publish an Infrastructure and Marsh Assessment every five years, identifying and prioritizing vulnerabilities.

- Coordinate with relevant entities (e.g., Charleston County EMS, KIU, BEC, CERT, KICA) to ensure comprehensive assessments.

#### Objective PI3

Increase transparency in regulatory and development processes regarding infrastructure and marsh management.

##### Strategy PI3.1

Regularly communicate with stakeholders

on issues related to critical infrastructure and marsh conservation.

#### Objective PI4

Secure funding and support for critical infrastructure and marsh improvements.

##### Strategy PI4.1

Pursue federal and state funding opportunities for infrastructure projects, particularly for raising the Kiawah Island Parkway from the roundabout at Freshfields to the Main gate.

Conduct feasibility studies and cost-benefit analyses for major infrastructure projects, such as raising/widening the Kiawah Island Parkway.

#### Objective PI5

Implement a marsh mitigation strategy.

##### Strategy PI5.1

Develop and maintain a town marsh mitigation fund to support conservation and restoration efforts.

##### Strategy PI5.2

Coordinate with Kiawah Conservancy and other stakeholders to identify priority areas for marsh mitigation and restoration.

##### Strategy PI5.3

Integrate marsh mitigation efforts into the broader infrastructure improvement plans to ensure holistic environmental and development approaches.



# 11



## resiliencynext

**Goal: To preserve and enhance Kiawah's natural and built environments in the face of changing environmental conditions.**

**Resiliency**  
*Considers the impacts of flooding, high water, and natural hazards on individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, economic development, public infrastructure and facilities, and public health, safety, and welfare.*

**Big Ideas**  
*Preserving Kiawah  
Public Safety and Resilience Strategy*

- Objectives**
- R1 -Determine a long-term law enforcement strategy that best protects and serves Kiawah's diverse entities, functions, and needs.*
  - R2 - Continuously monitor the adequacy of emergency preparedness plans and communicate them to all Island populations.*
  - R3 - Improve emergency operations coordination among all key stakeholders.*
  - R4 - Conduct comprehensive Town risk assessment.*

### Overview

Kiawah Island faces unique challenges as a coastal barrier island. Resiliency - the capacity to survive, adapt, and flourish in changing conditions - is paramount to Kiawah's long-term well-being. This plan addresses four key areas: Monitor, Protect, Engage, and Restore.

Our approach aims to honor Kiawah's past while securing its future. We outline strategies to detect environmental changes, mitigate impacts, educate the community, and implement nature-based solutions. These strategies are proactive and rooted in the island's character.

This plan will serve as a roadmap as we face pressures from climate change and evolving conditions. It will guide our efforts to protect Kiawah while building a stronger, more adaptable community for future generations.

### Future Planning Approach

The future of Kiawah Island faces some uncertainty since the Town's development agreement with Kiawah Partners expired in December of 2023, and its development agreement with Kiawah Island Golf Resort is nearing expiration. Key questions include: How will Kiawah grow, and what will regulate this growth? The island's future presents both opportunities and challenges. Proactive planning is essential to address these issues.

Several of these external forces are stressing Kiawah's systems in a way that makes this barrier island particularly vulnerable. Growing development pressures, consistent resident occupation and use, changing demographics, shifting consumer preferences, ongoing climate changes, aging properties, increasing traffic, and degradation of natural habitats are just some of the changing conditions. These forces make the island more susceptible to growing pressures and/or potential acute shocks. Numerous recent restoration projects have addressed some of these growing concerns with large-scale investments from the Town and key stakeholders. This comprehensive plan strives to offer strategies that are proactive in nature and focused on longevity.

In recent years, planning efforts across the nation have enthusiastically embraced the concept of resiliency to ensure the long-term well-being of our cities and towns. While initially considered somewhat synonymous to sustainability, resiliency is now understood to be a much broader, well-rounded concept that touches many facets of community planning. Resiliency focuses on the capacity of communities, institutions, and systems to survive, adapt, and thrive in the face of changing conditions, new stresses, and acute events. Resiliency defines community

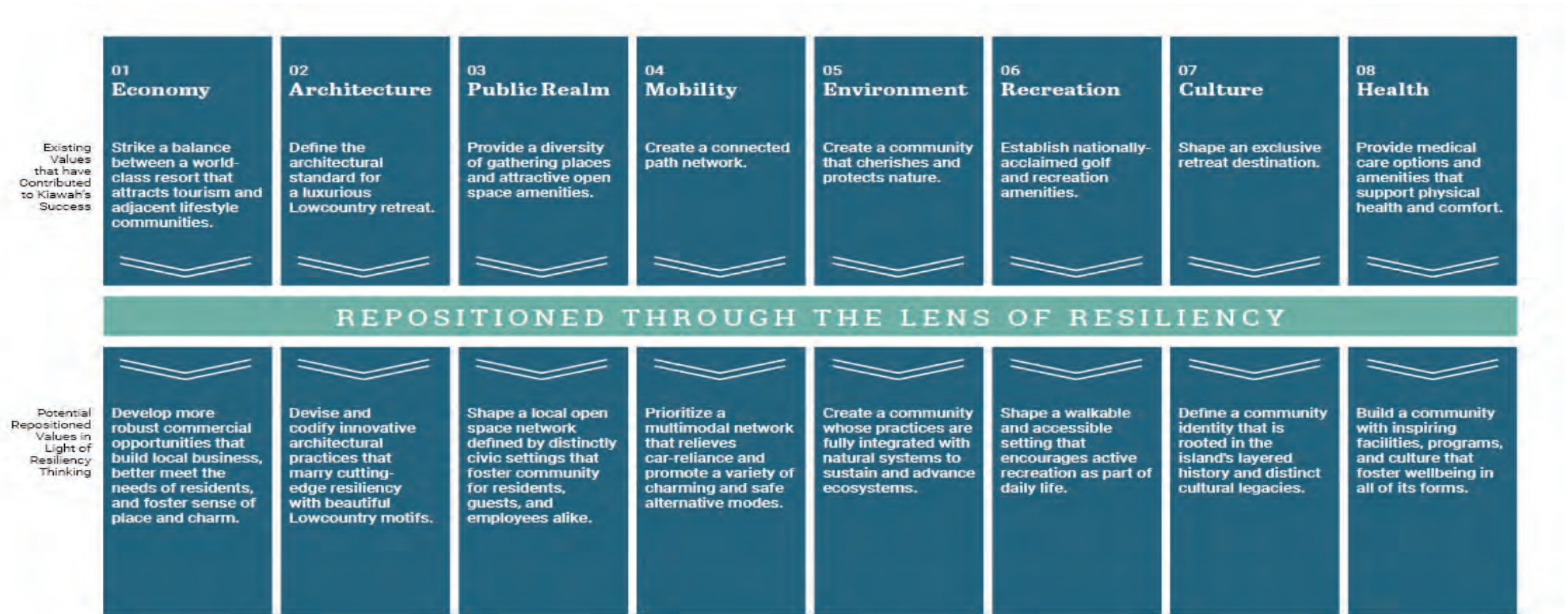
well-being as the combined strength of countless interwoven topics such as housing, food, ecosystems, health, economy, culture, infrastructure, and leadership. Resiliency can help Kiawah mitigate risks, enhance its existing values, and define a secure path for the island's future.

### Preserving Kiawah

While resiliency contemplates future challenges, it certainly adds value to the present, often hearkening back to the past. It considers tried and true best practices that have shaped thriving communities and beloved places that have stood the test of time.

Kiawah has created something of a timeless character, which lends much to its charm. Planning for resiliency will not remove anything from the island's existing directives; it will advance the case for furthering what is unique and cherished about this charming

coastal village. There is a powerful opportunity to seize upon resiliency as a key driver in the comprehensive plan's development, safeguarding and enhancing the spirit and well-being of the island.



### Emergency Operations

The Town of Kiawah Island uses an Emergency Preparedness Plan and updates it on an annual basis. The purpose of this plan is to keep residents and organizations on Kiawah Island informed of conditions which may present a threat to life and/or property and to ensure that all information, recommendations, and/or orders coming from national, state, or local authorities are passed on to all residents and organizations.

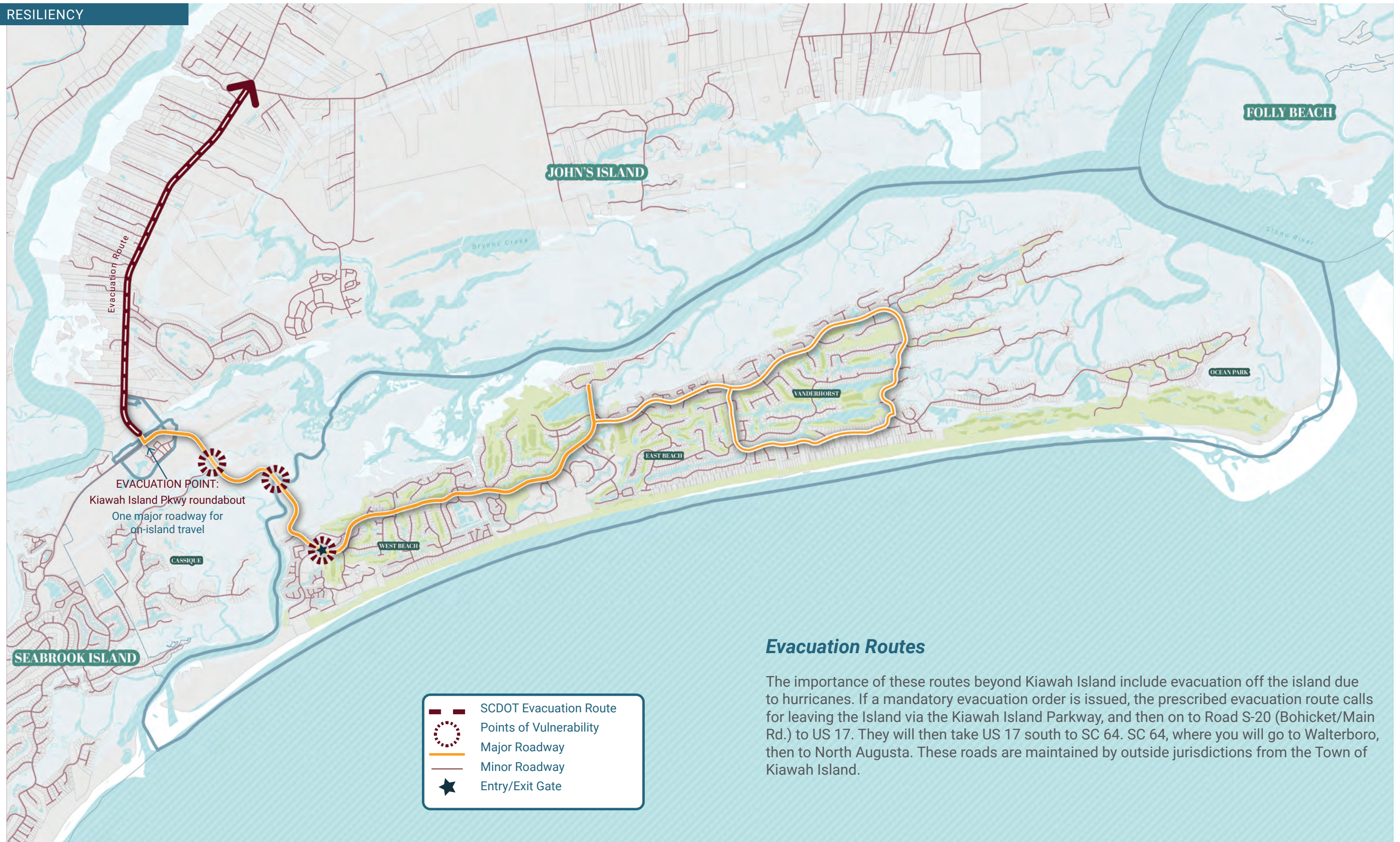
To handle recovery from a natural disaster, the Town has a pre-positioned debris removal contract that allows for the removal of vegetative, construction, animal, and debris from the right of ways of all streets on the Island. This contract also provides for damage assessments, debris reduction, barge transportation, temporary housing, satellite phone service and meals in a post disaster scenario.

The Town has a telephone notification system called CodeRED. It is used to communicate to residents in emergency situations or critical community alerts such as evacuation notices, boil water notices, tornado warnings, and flash flood notices. The Town is also an active participant in the Charleston County Emergency Operations Center. This allows the Town to communicate status updates, request resources and distribute public information notices with the County, fire, law enforcement, medical personnel and news media from a remote location should an evacuation occur.

A previous objective, under Community Facilities (page), would establish an Island-wide communications channel. This channel could centralize all communications, including the emergency and community alerts described above.



Hurricane Ian clean-up, Source: KICA



## Public Safety

Kiawah Island's Public Safety Committee ensures the wellbeing of those on the island is protected.

To achieve this, they coordinate town public safety and security activities with all other island security services, and serve as liaisons with the St. Johns Fire District, Charleston County Emergency Medical Services, and the Charleston County Sheriff's Office Supervisor of the town's contracted CCSP deputies. The committee also monitors the performance and activities of the town's contracted beach patrol service and the code enforcement activities of the town for all areas within its jurisdiction.

At the will and direction of the Town Council, the committee engages in any activities, investigations, analyses, etc., relating to public welfare and safety. A long-term island security plan is devised to ensure the continued safety of those on the island. Recommendations are shared with the Town Council on ways to improve the quality of public safety on the island.

This includes ensuring that, in the event of a natural disaster, appropriate plans are in force to accommodate evacuation, emergency law enforcement, and any other services required to ensure the personal safety of all citizens, property owners, and visitors to Kiawah Island and to secure all properties within the boundaries of the jurisdiction of the town.

## Coastal Flooding

The natural resources and ecologies of Kiawah Island provide critical resistance to weather events. *The Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation for Kiawah Island, SC*, outlines the risks of flooding on Kiawah Island and lists actionable steps to take in order to best mitigate these risks. The Flood Mitigation and

Sea Level Rise Adaptation Subcommittee, of the Town of Kiawah Island's Environmental Committee, insists that a well-planned and executed stormwater management system is critical to handling flooding events on the island. Kiawah has an extensive system of interconnected ponds that can accommodate a rainfall event equivalent to a 100-year flood, but expected increased flooding will prove to be a challenge against the system. Continued maintenance and evaluation should be made to the stormwater management system. Steps taken by property owners are encouraged to adapt their residences and landscapes to more frequent flooding.

Kiawah Island also needs to evaluate its road system and take actions to ensure main arteries remain passable for emergency personnel. Planning should look several decades into the future, not just at immediate flooding problems. A recent storm event, a Nor'easter in December 2023, caused record-breaking flooding on the island. The storm coincided with high tide, causing inundation across the island, and covering critical infrastructure and roadways.

The Environmental Committee recommends protecting the barrier island's natural assets. One example is the preservation and restoration of Kiawah's salt marshes. The salt marsh protects the land from erosion by reducing wave action and provides abundant wildlife that serves vital functions for the health of the ecosystem. Another example, dependence on potable water provided by rain water flowing into the underlying groundwater reservoirs beneath the island. Droughts and seawater rise threaten this storage of freshwater. The retention of freshwater may need to be considered if this threat persists.

## Public Safety & Resiliency Strategy

Joint and coordinated action is essential to ensuring adequate procedures and responses to threats to public safety. To better prepare, the Town of Kiawah Island should create a unified *Public Safety and Resiliency Strategy*, in collaboration with necessary island stakeholders and partners. This strategy will work to provide residents, property owners, and visitors with a safe and secure environment. The strategy will include:

- Assess and identify the town's exposure and financial liability to potential risks.
- Regularly test the effectiveness of emergency response systems and plans.
- Study and understand the resilience of utilities in normal and disaster scenarios.
- Determine if Kiawah's existing first responders are adequately addressing safety conditions.
- Determine a long-term law enforcement strategy that best serves Kiawah Island's diverse needs.
- Define roles and responsibilities of key organizations amid emergency scenarios.

Additionally, the Town should consider the creation of a new town staff position, the Chief Resiliency Officer, to oversee, coordinate, and implement the Public Safety and Resiliency Strategy.



**resiliency**  
**objectives and strategies**

**GOAL:**

*Protecting all Kiawah residents & stakeholders from risks to public safety.*

**Objective R1**

Determine a long-term law enforcement strategy that best protects and serves Kiawah’s diverse entities, functions, and needs.

**Strategy R1.1**

Study and understand a suite of options for long-term law enforcement options.

**Objective R2**

Continuously monitor the adequacy of emergency preparedness plans and communicate them to all Island populations.

**Strategy R2.1**

Establish a *Public Safety and Resiliency Strategy* for Kiawah Island.

**Strategy R2.2**

Create a dedicated role responsible for creating a *Public Safety and Resiliency Strategy*.

- This role would be referred to as the Chief Resiliency Officer.

**Strategy R2.3**

Organize and support resiliency efforts through other dedicated personnel.

**Strategy R2.4**

Coordinate with KIA on issues relating to the *Public Safety and Resiliency Strategy*.

- Provide residents, property owners, and visitors with a safe and secure environment.
- Determine a long-term law enforcement strategy that best serves Kiawah Island’s diverse needs.

**Objective R3**

Improve emergency operations coordination among all key stakeholders.

**Strategy R3.1**

Forming an Emergency Management Committee.

- Include representatives from the Town, KICA, KIGR, and other key stakeholders.
- This committee would oversee the development, implementation, and regular updates of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).

**Strategy R4**

Conduct comprehensive Town risk assessment.

- Identify potential hazards specific to Kiawah Island (e.g., hurricanes, flooding).
- Assess vulnerabilities and potential impacts on the community.

