

**Town of Kiawah Island Zoning Ordinance Amendment Request**  
**Case AZO25-000010 Case History**

**Planning Commission Meeting: September 10, 2025**  
**Public Hearing and First Reading:**  
**Second Reading:**

**CASE INFORMATION**

Applicant: Town of Kiawah Island

Application: The Town of Kiawah is requesting to amend the *Town of Kiawah Island Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance* to establish a review body to provide a clear and transparent process for the architectural design review of commercial, mixed-use, civic, and multi-family residential developments in the Town of Kiawah Island, ensuring new development projects support community character and environmental stewardship.

The proposed ordinance establishes two new sections as referenced:

- Section 12-24.2. Design Review Board
- Section 12-130. Architectural Design Standards.

Background: In 2023, The Town of Kiawah Island and the Kiawah Island Community Association formed the Architectural Review Board Joint Workgroup with the goal of collaborating on the formation of a new, community-led architectural control function. This workgroup initially focused on identifying concerns around the cost, consistency and transparency of the existing architectural control processes on Kiawah. The goal of this transition was to permanently place responsibility for the architectural integrity of Kiawah Island into the hands of property owners. With the efforts, considerations and actions of this transition process to date, there is uncertainty of the comprehensive timeline and future architectural controls for development on Kiawah. With the uncertainty of architectural controls for development in the future for Kiawah Island, the Town of Kiawah Island now finds that it is in the public interest to amend the Town of Kiawah Island Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance to establish a body which makes provisions to protect and improve the unique character of Kiawah Island. The Town of Kiawah's proposed design review board will operate and function independently of any existing architectural review controls.

Legal Framework: The proposed DRB would be established under the authority of South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994 (Title 6, Chapter 29, SC Code) ( S.C. Code 1976, §§ 6-29-870—6-29-910)

The proposed ordinance establishes a Design Review Board and administration of architectural design controls via an established *Town of Kiawah Island Architectural Design Principles and Guidelines*.

**RECOMMENDATION BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

Pursuant to §12-158(3) of the *Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance* "The Planning Commission shall review the proposed text amendment and/or zoning map amendment and take action, recommending that the Town Council approve or deny the proposed amendment. The Planning Commission may hold a public hearing in accordance with the procedures in section 12-156. The Planning Commission's recommendation shall be based on the approval criteria of subsection (6) of this section. The Planning Commission shall submit its recommendation to the Town Council within 30 working days of the Planning Commission meeting at which the amendment was introduced. A simple majority vote of Planning Commission members present, and voting shall be required to approve the amendment."

**DECISION ON AMENDMENT BY THE TOWN COUNCIL**

Pursuant to §12-158(5) of the *Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance* "After receiving the

recommendation of the Planning Commission, the Town Council shall hold one or more public hearings, and any time after the close of the public hearing, take action to approve, approve with modifications, or deny the proposed amendment based on the approval criteria of subsection (6) of this section. A simple majority vote of Town Council members present, and voting shall be required to approve the amendment. Zoning map amendments shall not be approved with conditions. Prior to action on a proposed code text amendment, the Town Council may, in the exercise of its legislative discretion, invoke the "pending ordinance doctrine" by ordinance so that no building permits shall be issued for structures which would be affected by the proposed amendment until the Town Council has rendered its decision on the proposed amendment.

#### **APPROVAL CRITERIA**

Pursuant to §12-158(6) of the *Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance*, (6) Approval criteria. Text and zoning map amendments to the ordinance may be approved if the following approval criteria have been met:

- a. The proposed amendment is consistent with the purposes and intent of the adopted Town of Kiawah Island Comprehensive Plan;
- b. The proposed amendment is consistent with the purposes and intent of this article;
- c. The purpose of the proposed amendment is to further the general health, safety and welfare of the Town of Kiawah Island;
- d. The proposed amendment corrects an error or inconsistency or meets the challenge of a changed condition.

#### **PLANNING STAFF REVIEW**

The next stage of this process in establishing architectural review controls for the Town, is to formulate principles, standards, and or guidelines. Planning staff recommends design principles be established to guide decisions of the proposed design review board. These principles consider the following elements:

- Site Orientation and Building Layout
- Massing and Scale
- Building and Structure Heights
- Fenestration
- Environmental Stewardship

**Planning staff finds the proposed amendment satisfies the approval criteria pursuant to §12-158(6) and recommends approval.**

#### **PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING SEPTEMBER 10, 2025**

Notifications: Notice of this meeting has been published and posted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Town of Kiawah Island.

-

**Sec. 12-24.2. Design Review Board.**

- (a) *Creation.* The Town of Kiawah Island Design Review Board (DRB) has been created and is authorized to act pursuant to S.C. Code 1976, §§ 6-29-870—6-29-910.
- (b) *Composition and appointment of term of office of members.*
- (1) The Design Review Board shall consist of five members. The DRB shall consist of a cross section of compensated design professionals and non-compensated property owners or resident members, all to be appointed by the Town Council. At least four members shall be registered design professionals or have relevant professional credentials and expertise in the areas of architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, construction or similar field. The term "resident member" means a person who resides permanently within the Town of Kiawah Island for not less than eight months of each calendar year.
  - (2) The term of office for members shall be four years from the date of appointment. Any vacancies shall be filled for the unexpired term by the Town Council. Only compensated members are eligible to receive compensation for their service at the discretion of Town Council. All members may also be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred in connection with their official duties, provided the Town Council has approved such expenditures in advance. Compensation shall be set by Town Council.
  - (3) No member shall serve more than three consecutive terms of office; provided, however, that such member shall be eligible to hold such office after a break in service of 12 months.
  - (4) No member shall hold an elected public office in the Town of Kiawah Island or Charleston County.
  - (5) The DRB shall elect a chair and vice-chair for one-year terms.
  - (6) The Planning Director or designee shall serve as Secretary of the DRB.
- (c) *Administrative office.* The Office of the DRB shall be located in the Town Municipal Center. All applications or requests and other papers to be filed with the DRB are to be filed with the Planning Director or designee of the Kiawah Island Planning Department not less than 30 working days prior to the DRB meeting at which the matter will be heard.
- (d) *Meetings.* Meetings of the DRB shall be at the call of the Chairperson and at such other times as the DRB may determine.
- (1) All meetings of the DRB shall be open to the public.
  - (2) The Chairperson may call a special meeting of the Design Review Board. In the event that such a special meeting is called, the Chairperson, at their discretion, shall give notice to interested parties that any or all pending matters before the DRB will be heard and considered at such special meeting.
- (e) *Rules of procedures and records.* The DRB shall adopt rules of organizational procedure and shall keep a record of its resolutions, findings, and determinations, which record must be a public record. The DRB shall keep minutes of its proceedings, showing the vote of each member upon each question or, if absent or failing to vote, indicating such actions, all of which shall immediately be filed in the office of the DRB and shall be a public record. The DRB may purchase equipment and supplies and may employ or contract for such staff and such experts as it considers necessary and consistent with funds appropriated by Town Council.
- (f) *Functions and powers.* The Design Review Board shall have the following powers:
- (1) The DRB shall have jurisdiction over all lands within the municipal limits of the Town of Kiawah Island.
  - (2) The DRB shall establish a process for sequenced reviews that will protect and improve the visual and aesthetic character of development within the Town of Kiawah Island.

# DRAFT

---

- (3) The DRB shall review and render decisions using guidelines as referenced within the “Town of Kiawah Island Design Review Principles and Guidelines”.
  - (4) The DRB shall be in place to review and render decisions on proposed non-single-family residential developments pursuant to established architectural standards and guidelines of the Town of Kiawah Island.
  - (5) The DRB may recommend such legislation as may be needed and practicable to pursue the purpose for which the DRB was established.
- (g) *Filing of applications to the Design Review Board.*
- (1) All applications and matters brought before the DRB shall be heard in the order of filing at the regular meeting of the DRB; provided, however, that the DRB shall set its meeting agenda and determine the number of applications it will hear.
- (h) *Published notice for hearings of the Design Review Board.* Applications considered for a final review decision of the DRB shall be held pursuant to notice provisions as specified in Section 12-156.
- (i) *Decisions of Design Review Board.* The DRB shall approve, approve with conditions or disapprove applications submitted pursuant to this article and the “Town of Kiawah Island Design Review Principles and Guidelines”.
- (1) The DRB may grant relief from established principles and guidelines, where exceptional circumstances exist and where the DRB determines that the applicant demonstrates the relief does not adversely affect the character of the properties within the vicinity nor interfere with the purposes of this article.
  - (2) The DRB may attach to it such conditions regarding the location, character, or other features of the proposed building or structure as the DRB may consider advisable to protect neighborhood character, aesthetic or property values in the surrounding area, or to promote the public health, safety, or general welfare.
- (j) *Lapse of approval.* DRB approval shall lapse and be of no further effect 18 months after the date the application and development plans were granted approval by the DRB.
- (k) *Minutes of the Design Review Board.* The decisions of the DRB shall be in writing and signed by the Chairperson or designee. The minutes of the DRB shall show the vote of each member upon each question, or if a member is absent or fails to vote, the minutes shall indicate such fact. The decisions of the DRB shall be filed in the offices of the DRB. These decisions shall be a public record.
- (l) *Appeals from Design Review Board decisions.* Any person who may have a substantial interest in any decision of the DRB or any officer or agent of the Town may appeal from any decision of the DRB to the Circuit Court in and for the county by filing with the clerk of such court a petition in writing setting forth plainly, fully and distinctly wherein such decision is contrary to law. Such appeal shall be filed within 30 calendar days after the decision of the DRB is rendered.

(Ord. No. 2024-01, § 2(Exh. E), 4-2-2024)

**Sec. 12-130. Architectural Design Standards.**

- (1) *Purpose and Intent.* The purpose of these regulations are to provide a clear and transparent process for the architectural design review of commercial, mixed-use, civic, and multi-family residential developments in the Town of Kiawah Island, ensuring new development projects support community character and environmental stewardship.

The intent of these regulations is to:

- a. Preserve the natural character of existing neighborhoods;
  - b. Ensure aesthetic compatibility with existing character of Kiawah;
  - c. Promote integrated development with nature;
  - d. Maintain and or improve aesthetic values; and to
  - e. Establish consistent application of minimum standards and guidelines for architectural design.
- (2) *Applicability & Exemptions.* The provisions of this article apply to all real property within the municipal limits of the Town of Kiawah Island, excluding single-family residential developments, except single family residential developments which are not subject to review or purview of any established architectural review board.
- (3) *Architectural Standards and Guidelines.* Proposed developments shall be reviewed in accordance the provisions of this article and the “Town of Kiawah Island Design Review Principles and Guidelines”.
- (4) *Application & Review Stages.*
- a. *Preliminary Review:* Prior to advancing a development project, the applicant shall submit for preliminary review and approval to the Design Review Board. Preliminary Review shall not constitute final approval of architectural design.
  - b. *Final Review:* Prior to submitting for zoning review and approval, applicants shall receive final Design Review Board approval.
- (5) *Design Review Board.*
- a. The Design Review Board shall review with the authority to approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove developments in accordance with the provisions of the article.
- (6) *Inspections, Violations, and Fines.*
- a. The Town reserves the right to inspect the site or property at any reasonable time for compliance with approved standards and guidelines. Town Staff may inspect the site one year after the issuance of a permanent Certificate of Occupancy in order to ensure compliance with the approved plans.
  - b. If the Town finds a development in violation of this article or if an applicant fails to satisfy any condition that was imposed as part of the original or revised approval of the proposed development that was made pursuant to the provisions of this article, the applicant or property owner shall be in violation of this article.
  - c. Any applicant or property owner in violation of this ordinance shall be subject to fines or penalties as prescribed in this article and or other remedies and enforcement actions pursuant to section 12-214.

# DRAFT

## Town of Kiawah Island

### Design Review Board – Architectural Design Principles & Guidelines

---

#### Purpose

These design principles and guidelines are intended to guide property owners and design professionals in achieving thoughtful, context-sensitive architecture that reflects Kiawah Island's unique character. All projects should reinforce the Town's principle of Living with Nature within the comprehensive plan by integrating built form with the Island's natural landscape, scale, and community character.

#### Implementation and Review

- The Design Review Board will apply these guidelines as a framework for review, balancing flexibility with consistency.
  - Applicants are encouraged to submit contextual studies, perspective renderings, and material samples demonstrating how projects meet these principles.
  - The DRB may require modifications where proposals conflict with the intent of these principles and guidelines.
- 

#### A. Site Orientation and Layout

##### Principles

- Respect the Island's natural topography, vegetation, and ecological systems.
- Prioritize site planning that reduces visual and environmental impacts.
- Encourage connections to the pedestrian and open space network.

##### Guidelines

1. Orient primary building facades to maximize natural light and ventilation while minimizing heat gain.
2. Position buildings to preserve significant trees, wetlands, dunes, and other natural features.

## DRAFT

3. Avoid large expanses of paving; cluster parking areas and screen them with native landscaping.
  4. Site buildings to maintain view corridors to natural features (marsh, forest edges, ocean).
  5. Incorporate pedestrian pathways, shaded outdoor areas, and connections to nearby amenities.
- 

### **B. Massing and Scale**

#### **Principles**

- Ensure buildings complement the Island's human-scaled, natural character.
- Break down larger developments into visually cohesive but distinct components.
- Use form and rhythm to harmonize with surrounding development and natural setting.

#### **Guidelines**

1. Employ varied rooflines, articulated facades, and step-backs to avoid monolithic appearances.
  2. Use massing strategies that reflect a hierarchy of forms (primary volume with secondary wings or terraces).
  3. Break large buildings into smaller scaled segments to maintain pedestrian-friendly proportions.
  4. Design transitions between building elements to reduce perceived bulk at edges or along public frontages.
  5. Consider how massing interacts with the skyline and treeline, ensuring natural dominance.
- 

### **C. Building and Structure Heights**

#### **Principles**

- Building height should reinforce Kiawah's low-rise, nature-focused identity.

## DRAFT

- Height should transition thoughtfully to surrounding contexts, especially near sensitive habitats and existing neighborhoods.

### Guidelines

1. Limit building heights to maintain a harmonious relationship with surrounding vegetation and structures.
  2. Step down heights along sensitive edges (adjacent single-family areas, critical area, marsh fronts, or ocean fronts).
  3. Use roof forms (hipped, gabled, or gently sloped) to blend with the natural canopy line.
  4. Screen rooftop mechanicals and equipment with architectural enclosures integrated into building design.
  5. Avoid flat-topped silhouettes that create stark contrasts with the natural environment.
- 

## D. Fenestration (Windows, Doors, Openings)

### Principles

- Openings should contribute to human scale, rhythm, and transparency while respecting privacy and energy performance.
- Fenestration should enhance the building's relationship to the outdoors and natural light.

### Guidelines

1. Windows and doors should be proportioned and grouped to create balanced compositions.
2. Avoid excessive expanses of unbroken glass; use mullions, bays, or screens to provide rhythm.
3. Orient and shade fenestration to minimize glare and heat gain while maximizing natural light.
4. Employ materials and colors that reduce reflectivity and blend with natural surroundings.

## DRAFT

5. Encourage the use of porches, loggias, screened rooms, and recessed openings to create depth and shadow.
  6. Ground-floor fenestration should promote activity and visual connection with the public realm.
- 

### **E. Environmental Stewardship and Process**

#### **Principles**

- Protect Kiawah's ecosystems during and after construction.
- Minimize disruption and restore impacted areas.

#### **Guidelines**

1. Establish tree/vegetation protection zones before construction.
2. Employ low-impact construction access and staging to development sites.
3. Use native plantings for restoration and landscape.
4. Integration of pervious materials and nature based solutions for stormwater management
5. Encourage sustainable materials and energy-efficient building practices.