

TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

kiawahnext

Revisions as of 6-25

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025

Table of Contents

part one: vision & overview

- 09 **glossy of terms**
- 10 **executive summary**
- 14 **kiawah by the numbers**

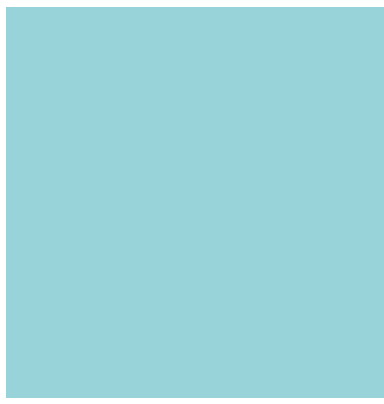
part two: strategic priorities for kiawah's future

- 18 **development**
- 22 **community experience**
- 26 **infrastructure**
- 27 **resiliency**

part three: appendix

- 31 **process**
- 44 **governance**
- 49 **population**
- 55 **economic development**
- 62 **natural resources**
- 80 **cultural resources**
- 85 **community facilities**
- 93 **housing**
- 99 **landuse**
- 110 **transportation**
- 125 **priority investments**
- 132 **resiliency**





TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

kiawahnext

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025



Acknowledgements

The planning process was managed by the staff of the Town of Kiawah Island, steered by the Planning Commission and former Planning Commissioners, adopted by the Mayor and Town Council, and envisioned by the residents of Kiawah.

TOWN COUNCIL

Mayor Bradley D. Belt

Mayor Pro Tempore Russell Berner

Council Member E. Luke Farrell

Council Member Madeleine Kaye

Council Member Lance Spencer

TOWN STAFF

Stephanie Tillerson, AICP, Town Administrator

John Taylor, Jr., Planning Director

Jim Jordan

Brian Gottshalk

Patrea St. John

Bruce Spicher

Dorota Szubert

PLANNING COMMISSION

Joanne K. Hennessy, Chair

Larry Iwan, Vice-Chair

Eugene A. Babinec

John Connolly

Sandra L. Devine

Robert Ryan

Mary E. Schmersal

WITH CONTRIBUTION FROM FORMER PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Andrew J. Capelli

Ronald Curran, MD

William Dowdy

E. Luke Farrell

Madeleine Kaye



a bold vision for
Kiawah's bright future



01 section

part one: vision

- 01 vision**
- 02 blueprint**
- 03 comprehensive plan elements**

kiawahnext

part I: snapshot

Glossary of Terms

Kiawah Governance Entities and Major Stakeholders

Kiawah - The entire municipal boundaries of the Town of Kiawah Island, establishing the legal jurisdictional framework for all municipal government functions and authority.

Kiawah Island Alliance - The proposed formalized coordination mechanism among major stakeholders including the Town, KICA, Kiawah Island Golf Resort, and Kiawah Partners, designed to enhance collaboration and strategic planning for the Island's future development.

Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) - Kiawah's primary property owners' association responsible for operating the main and secondary security gates, managing KICA's amenities, including bike paths and boardwalks, enforcing community regulations, and maintaining common areas throughout the island.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR) - The resort entity that provides lodging and amenities, including five golf courses, tennis and pickleball facilities, pools, restaurants, and special events programming

Kiawah Partners - The original master developer of Kiawah Island that owns and operates Kiawah Island Real Estate and the Kiawah Island Club, a membership-based organization providing golf courses, recreational facilities, and dining amenities.

Town - The municipal government of the Town of Kiawah Island, responsible for core governmental functions including public safety, zoning administration, building services, infrastructure maintenance, and municipal policy implementation within the corporate limits.

Other terms

Build-out - The point when an area reaches its maximum development capacity under existing zoning regulations and land use restrictions. For the Town, this represents completion of all approved residential, commercial, and recreational development.

Choke Points - Locations where traffic flow becomes significantly constrained, creating bottlenecks that impede the efficient movement of vehicles. In the KiawahNext Plan context, this specifically refers to the Main Gate, Freshfields commercial area, and the Kiawah-Seabrook roundabout.

End-stage Development - The development phase when remaining undeveloped properties reach completion and redevelopment of existing structures becomes the primary development activity rather than new construction on vacant land.

Island - Generally refers to all properties under the jurisdiction and subject to the covenant restrictions of the Kiawah Island Community Association.

Living with Nature - Kiawah Island's foundational philosophy and approach to development that emphasizes harmony between the built environment and natural systems, incorporating environmental stewardship, wildlife protection, and sustainable design principles into all planning and development decisions.

Resiliency - The community's capacity to adapt, prepare for, and recover from environmental challenges including sea level rise, severe weather events, and climate change impacts while maintaining essential services and infrastructure functionality.

Executive Summary^{next}

KiawahNext is a comprehensive plan guiding the Town of Kiawah Island's ("Town") future, advancing its vision of a harmonious residential community with an integrated world-class resort and shopping village within a preserved maritime setting. The plan balances quality development with natural preservation, prioritizing resilience throughout all implementation aspects.

KiawahNext replaces the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, amended 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.

Three Critical Success Factors

Kiawah's success depends on the next level of collaboration and advocacy among key stakeholders. Kiawah's governance is characterized by a unique dual model comprised of the Town and KICA. Other central stakeholders include KIGR and Kiawah Partners, EDENS, and holders of conservation easements on and around Kiawah, including Kiawah Conservancy and Low Country and Lowcountry Land Trust. The Town exists adjacent to the boundaries of Johns Island, part of Charleston County. Significant growth within Johns Island has placed increasing pressure on roads and other infrastructure, with direct dependencies and impacts upon the Kiawah community. Over the coming decade, growth within Kiawah and Johns Island will require greater levels of collaboration and advocacy to ensure the Town and Kiawah's interests are best balanced among at-times competing drivers and objectives.

Managing Growth. The next decade will be defined

by build-out of remaining commercial development entitlements and plans, driving further growth in a thriving tourism-based economy. Additionally, as Kiawah approaches maximum residential build-out, the focus shifts from new construction to redevelopment of existing properties and amenities. This transition requires updated land use standards, permitting processes, and strategic coordination to ensure redevelopment maintains Kiawah's character while meeting evolving community needs.

Sustaining Kiawah's commitment to Living with Nature, is fundamental to the unique Kiawah experience.

From the start, Kiawah's special connection to nature has been characterized by its extraordinary natural environment shaped its identity, preserved and nurtured through careful planning and stewardship. Over the coming decade, enhancing resiliency and maintaining this connection to Kiawah's natural environment, is essential to sustaining what makes Kiawah unique as a community and as a world-class visitor destination.

Four Strategic Pillars for Kiawah's Future

Managing Development and Growth addresses the strategic management of Kiawah's remaining capacity as the Kiawah approaches build-out completion, with residential units expected to grow from 4,422 to approximately 5,300 units over the next decade. While the full-time residential population is expected to grow modestly, significant expansion of multi-family and mixed-use properties is expected to drive increasing growth rates in the visitor / non-resident population.

This priority emphasizes managing the coming wave of commercial and mixed-use development, preparing for the shift from new development to redevelopment activities, and putting in place structured mechanisms for greater collaboration among key stakeholders

Community Experience focuses on maintaining the exceptional quality of life that defines Kiawah for its diverse population of full-time residents, part-time residents, and annual visitors. This includes preserving natural resources, managing traffic challenges, incentivizing strategies to support managed growth in tourism, and maintaining the heritage that contributes to Kiawah's unique character.

Infrastructure ensures that physical systems supporting community life remain robust and forward-looking, addressing capacity constraints emerging as Kiawah has matured and grown to its current state; along with preparing for emergency circumstances and environmental challenges.

Resiliency prepares the community to adapt and thrive amid environmental changes, continuing Kiawah's 50-year commitment to design and development in harmony with nature while building capacity to address sea level rise, nuisance flooding, and other climate-related challenges.

Strategic Action Plan^{next}

Implementation Roadmap for KiawahNext

This section summarizes and consolidates the highest impact recommended actions emerging from the four strategic priorities, providing a clear implementation roadmap to achieve Kiawah's vision over the next decade. Section 2 of the Plan, the Blueprint, provides greater detail regarding each of the four priority areas and associated recommendations, as follows:

1: Development and Growth

1.1 Establish the Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA) - Create a structured, formalized mechanism for enhanced coordination, joint planning, policy development and advocacy; and relationship management among Kiawah's key stakeholders.

1.2 Establish a Redevelopment Task Force - Charter an initiative to analyze trends in expected redevelopment across properties in Kiawah and within Town boundaries, to identify any current impediments to redevelopment that can positively shape Kiawah's future. This could encompass recommendations for incentives or other mechanisms to enable or accelerate strategic redevelopment activities.

1.3 Enhance Kiawah Advocacy - Evaluate strategies to more proactively advocate at the county, state and federal level with respect to the issues that directly affect Kiawah including roads and traffic, planning, infrastructure, and environmental matters.

2: Community Experience

2.1 Evaluate proactive strategies to manage traffic - Update existing traffic studies and identify mechanisms to better manage traffic flows into and within Kiawah as a top issue affecting future growth, safety and

community experience.

2.2 Explore creation of a tourism commission - Actively support managed growth in tourism consistent with the Kiawah brand and experience, including possible expanded focus on ecotourism.

2.3 Public Amenities - Identify and evaluate opportunities for investment in future public amenities of greatest interest and value to the Kiawah resident and visitor community.

2.4 Maintain and prioritize support for protection of Kiawah's wildlife - Consistent with Living with Nature initiatives.

3: Infrastructure

3.1 Stress Test Emergency Transportation Infrastructure - Conduct an evaluation and periodically review Kiawah's transportation infrastructure under normal and emergency circumstances, including potential use of leisure trails in emergency situations. This should expand upon the work initiated by KICA's Adaptive Management Plan Task Force.

3.2 Periodically evaluate the capacity, resilience and useful life of Kiawah critical utilities - Review performance and recovery plans under normal and emergency situations.

3.3 Evaluate strategies to adapt existing facilities to support growth, as well as the deployment of new models such as EV technologies - To make best use of existing sites and Resources.

4: Resiliency

4.1 Explore creation of a Chief Resilience

Officer role and function - To bring all resilience committees and reporting departments under one office to coordinate and drive resilience-related plans and initiatives.

4.2 Develop an ongoing, comprehensive, and collaborative community-awareness program

- That involving the major Kiawah stakeholders, to educate the extended community as to the role that both individuals and institutions can play in ensuring resiliency and sustainability of the Kiawah environment.

4.3 Prioritize cultural resource resilience

- Identify sites of cultural and historical significance to elevate visibility and build into the resiliency plan and strategy.

Kiawah by the Numbers



The following development and resource information is based on Charleston County's unincorporated Island and Town of Kiawah Island Permitted activities of April 7, 2025. Population and Tourism trends assume US Census and University of Virginia's tourism.

Top Trends Affecting Kiawah's Next Ten Years

As the island approaches end-stage single family build-out, growth will be centered in multi-family, commercial and mixed-use development. Traffic, roads, resiliency, and other infrastructure concerns are top issues, pressured by multiple factors both within the Town and surrounding areas.

Kiawah Key Facts

- **Incorporated:** September 13, 1988
- **Location:** 25 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina
- **Municipal boundaries** encompass Kiawah Island and annexed properties of Freshfields Village and the Town's Municipal Center.
- **Total Highlands:** ~3,725 acres
- **Land:** ~11 square miles (~7,100 acres)
- **Water/Wetlands:** ~2.4 square miles (~1,536 acres)
- **Beachfront:** ~10 miles of Atlantic Ocean shoreline

Population Trends with Impact on Kiawah Roads, Infrastructure and Amenities

Continued population growth expected, driven by visitors and longer part-time homeowner stays

Type	Key Drivers	Exp. Impact
Full-time Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~2,100 current FT residents • Modest growth projected 	
Part Time Property Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~6,000 P/T homeowners • More frequent and longer stays 	
"Stay" Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth driven by new development in short term rental and hotel units 	
Day Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned development outside of Kiawah with various forms of permissible access • New Kiawah amenities expected to drive growth in day visitors • Expected growth in daily commercial service providers 	

Total population: 10,000 – 12,000 during peak periods (2025)

Dwelling Unit Trends Impacts on Kiawah Resources - Expected

Excluding new hotel capacity, at least 20% increase from 2025 is expected, mostly driven by multifamily

Type	Key Drivers	Exp. Impact
Single Family: 3,341 Units*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~3,000 single family units with 341 undeveloped lots (2025) • Expected shift to redevelopment 	
Multifamily 1,921 Units**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~1,174 current units • 247 Under construction or site plan review • + 400-500 new units likely 	
Hotel up to ~650 units**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 current rooms • ~150-300 new hotel rooms projected 	

Total projected residential dwelling units excluding hotels: 5,262 (+ ~20%)

* Includes existing and projected new growth.
 ^ Some tradeoffs may occur between multifamily residential dwelling units and hotel rooms

LEGEND: Relative Expected Impact on Kiawah Resources (Roads Infrastructure, Community Facilities, Amenities)

- Highest Expected Impact
- Significant Expected Impact
- Moderate Expected Impact
- Minimal Expected Impact
- Lowest Expected Impact

Top Trends Affecting Kiawah's Next Ten Years

Significant activity in commercial and mixed-use development both on Kiawah and the surrounding Johns Island community is expected, with impact on Kiawah resources

Commercial / Resort Development – Inside Kiawah (TOKI)

Continued growth expected driven primarily by KIGR and Freshfields Village undeveloped properties.

Locations / Expected Use	Scale
KIGR: Undeveloped parcels at zoned / entitled to be developed as hotels, residential and commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 200 – 500 residential units
Seafields at FFV: Independent and Assisted Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 104 units (88 Independent; 16 Assisted)
MUSC: Freestanding Emergency Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~12,000 sqft likely to draw residents from lower Johns Island
Freshfields Village: Five undeveloped parcels permitted for commercial or residential (Town homes, freestanding units or units above retail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to ~80,000 sqft Up to 96 DUs remaining by FFV Planned Development

Residential / Commercial Development – Beyond Kiawah

Continued growth expected within unincorporated Charleston County, particularly on lower Johns Island.

Locations / Expected Use	Scale
Planned Andell West (Harris Teeter): likely to draw residents from lower Johns Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 160,000 sqft
Kiawah River: Entitled to ~1,200 homes; Dunlin Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 1,200 homes 72 guest rooms
Orange Hill: Access to Kiawah Island Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Golf course 128 homes, 68 cottages
Johns Island Junction: Mixed Use Development at intersection of Betsy Kerrison, River, Bohicket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 128,300 sqft commercial Up to 101 DUs
Kiawah River Estates / Oak Point: Expansion of golf facilities and residential with access to Kiawah via Governors Club (KIGR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [TBD]

Employment Snapshot

More than 3,000 employees from Town-based employers; Kiawah economy also supports 000s of service providers

Employers	# of Employees
Kiawah Island Golf Resort	~1,700 employees
Kiawah Partners / Kiawah Island Club and Real Estate	~ 800
Freshfields Village Businesses	350+
Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA)	100 +
Town of Kiawah Island	28
Barrier Island Ocean Rescue	40 (peak season)
Other daily service providers	~758 unique business licenses; ~16,300 annual commercial passes estimated

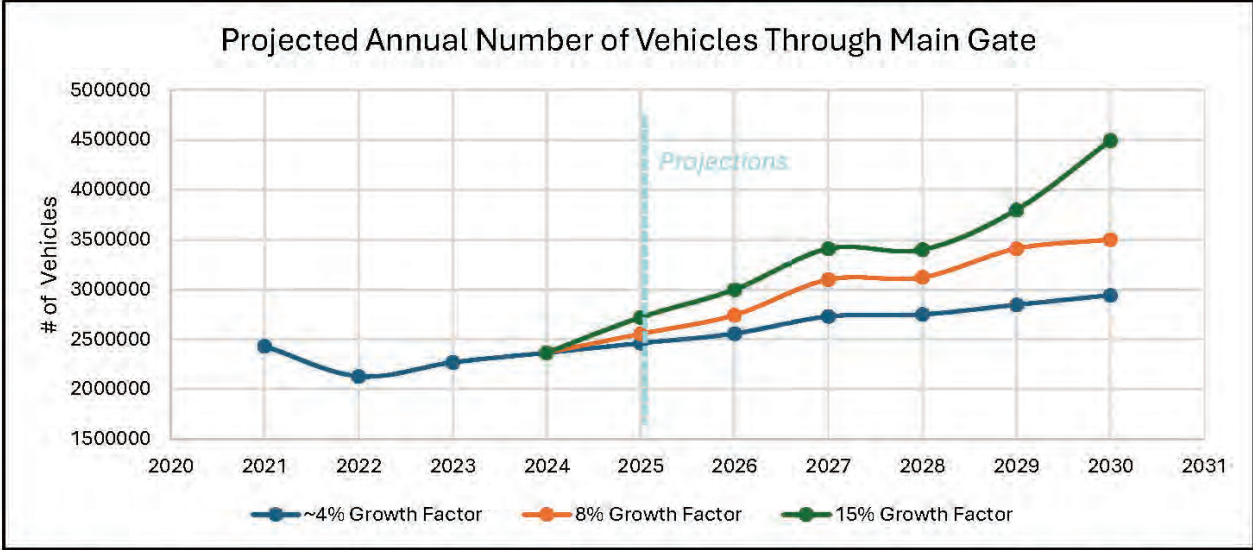
Tourism / Visitor Snapshot

Tourism continues to be strong component to Kiawah's economy, with time and dollars spent.

Tourism Factors	Trends
Short Term Rentals	1,374 licenses 1/3 of dwelling units (2025)
Non-resident stay visitors	~ 300,000 est. annual
Occupancy Rates (Vacation Rentals)	On average ~62% (booking pace and average rate for vacation rentals on Kiawah are increasing for the first six months of 2025).
Average Daily Rate (*outpacing inflation)	\$511 (2024) ~28% increase from 2019 (\$366) to 2024
Beachwalker County Park	~122,000 annual visitors (2024) Peak (July – October)

Top Trends Affecting Kiawah's Next Ten Years

Traffic volumes continue to increase. Substantial impact is expected both on island and approaching Kiawah at the traffic circle.



Kiawah currently experiences ~4% increase in total vehicles through the main gate. With a projected 20% growth in development, a growth factor of 4-15% can be expected. Projections do not illustrate the extreme seasonality of traffic during peak season.

Expected Growth in Vehicle Traffic

Traffic Indicator	Scale	Exp. Impact
Main Gate <i>Managed by KICA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase ~4% increase from 2023 (2.27M) – 2024 (2.37M) By 2030 projected ~3.5 - 4 million vehicles 	
Employees & Service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~758 unique business licenses projected + 3,000 employees contributes to ~16,300+ annual commercial passes 	
Annual Gate Passes: <i>KICA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~49,000+ issued day passes ~14,000 Owner /Guest passes 	
Recurring Gate Access Property owners beyond Kiawah with club memberships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing number of new developments added impact to infrastructure, community facilities and amenities (Orange Hill, Kiawah River Estates, etc.) 	
Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Traffic volumes are consistently higher during the summer months, reflecting peak tourist and part-time resident activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~7,300 vehicles per day on the KIP during June and July (2024) Weekends see consistently elevated traffic—particularly on Saturdays, which tend to show the highest single-day volumes, especially during mid-day hours. 	
Beachwalker County Park Beachwalker Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~50,000-57,000 vehicles annually visit the county park remaining relatively consistent due to parking limitations, however Beachwalker Drive experiences some back up during peak season. 	
Betsy Kerrison Parkway <i>SCDOT</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~8,700 Average Annual Daily Traffic (2024) Up ~10% from 2022 (7,800). Great percentage is estimated to route towards Kiawah. 	

01 vision

02 blueprint

03 comprehensive plan elements

kiawahnext

part II: blueprint

Strategic Priorities for Kiawah's Future^{next}

The KiawahNext Plan establishes four interconnected priorities that form the foundation for Kiawah's future development. These strategic focus areas –Development and Growth, Community Experience, Infrastructure, and Resiliency—address the critical aspects of sustaining and enhancing Kiawah as a world-class community and visitor destination while preserving its unique natural environment.

Each priority represents a distinct yet interdependent component of comprehensive community planning.

- **Development and Growth** addresses the strategic management of Kiawah's remaining capacity as the Town approaches residential build-out, completion parallel to significant future development activity expected within remaining commercial and mixed-use sites.
- **Community Experience** focuses on maintaining the robust economy and exceptional quality of life that defines Kiawah for residents and visitors.
- **Infrastructure** ensures that physical systems supporting community life remain robust and forward-looking, and capable of supporting both normal and emergency situations.
- **Resiliency** prepares the community to adapt and thrive amid environmental changes and challenges.

These priorities provide a comprehensive framework for balancing economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and community cohesion as Kiawah navigates the next decade of evolution.

1. *KiawahNext*: Development and Growth

Vision: The Town will take a strategic, balanced approach to future development, preserving Kiawah's unique character as a world-class community and destination. Core values—living with nature, economic sustainability, and climate resilience—will guide all planning and decisions over the next decade.

Context: The following factors directly influence the Town's development planning over the next decade:

Development of Remaining Residential, Commercial and Mixed-use Sites

Growth in new multi-family developments: Over the coming decade, projected developed units are expected to grow to approximately 5,400 from the current 4,400 units, a 20.3% increase, primarily driven by multi-family development. New commercial and mixed-use projects are expected to support this growth.

End-Stage Development: In parallel, Kiawah will approach maximum build-out for residential properties. As the current housing stock ages and new development reaches capacity limits, a shift toward redevelopment will accelerate across multi-family units, single-family homes, and supporting public and private amenities.

Shifts in Population Segments and Characteristics:

The Town is experiencing shifts in population growth, although the full scope is difficult to quantify due to limited data availability. Multiple indicators are evidence of this trend, including measurable growth in KICA members and anecdotal evidence of changing usage patterns.

KICA members increased 3% from 2023 to 2024 (9,264 to 9,541 members), with permanent residents comprising approximately 23% of this total. Vehicle traffic through the main gate rose 4.2% to 2.37 million vehicles annually. These numbers represent only part of the picture, as they exclude traffic on Beachwalker Drive outside the main gate.

Tracking visitor trends accurately is challenging. Recorded rental passes show modest increases; however, these figures significantly undercount actual visitor activity, as the Resort and most property management companies issue passes independently. The true scale of visitor growth remains largely invisible in official counts.

Anecdotal evidence suggests property owners are staying longer on Kiawah, evidenced by increased demand for member amenities. This shift toward extended occupancy amplifies population pressure beyond membership growth alone, creating sustained demand on island resources.

The surrounding Johns Island community adds external pressure, with the population nearly doubling from 11,477 to 21,057 between 2000 and 2020. This sea island growth compounds access infrastructure challenges while island occupancy simultaneously increases.

Tourism as a Key Driver of Kiawah's Economy:

Kiawah enjoys a vibrant economy, making significant contributions to state and county tax revenues and impacting the overall economic climate. Overall, Kiawah supports an estimated 6,500 jobs, with the Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR) being the island's largest employer, employing over 1,700 people and ranking #8 in the Charleston area. As Riverstone (parent company of KIGR) currently owns the largest percentage of undeveloped property on the island and sites

adjacent to Freshfields, KIGR will continue to play a central role in Kiawah's continued evolution.

However, growth in tourism, as well as growth in the surrounding Johns Island area, has placed increased stress on roads and infrastructure, including Kiawah's main gate. Solving these infrastructure and traffic issues will be essential to balancing the desired growth in tourism and the visitor population, which is crucial to Kiawah's economic health and vitality, while sustaining the unique character that draws residents and visitors alike to Kiawah.

Land Use: Several drivers will affect the evolution of permitted land use in the coming decade:

With fewer undeveloped properties remaining on Kiawah, thoughtful planning and collaboration is essential among Kiawah's stakeholders. This, combined with commitment to preserve and enhance Kiawah's natural surroundings, will shape the needs, requirements, and changing regulations for land use. The goal is to strategically use the remaining undeveloped areas for residential, recreational, civic, and commercial purposes, all while prioritizing the unique connection between Kiawah and nature and building resilience.

Annexation: Annexation can be a viable approach to support both defensive and offensive strategies to preserve, protect and enhance the Kiawah community. Any future annexation opportunities must be evaluated in context of the objective to strategically manage Kiawah's residential density and population, and to preserve and maintain the Kiawah experience.

Stability through Kiawah's Revenue Position and Sources:

The Town currently enjoys a strong financial position, with \$15.5 million in FY2025 revenues largely sourced from tourism-related taxes, business licenses, permits, and local fees.

BLUEPRINT

Through sound fiscal management and balanced investment strategies, the Town has accumulated a significant (\$46M) reserve fund in FY2025, which will provide critical flexibility for investments in areas such as enhancing resiliency, disaster recovery, and Town infrastructure.

The Town does not impose a property tax. Instead, Charleston County receives revenue through real estate taxes from Kiawah property owners (\$96M in FY2024), which directly support local fire services, schools, county parks, and Charleston County administrative functions. Due to Kiawah's unique population, the island does not have schools, and there are no plans to build them.

Key Relationships: Kiawah's continued development success relies on effective coordination among several key stakeholders with distinct but interconnected roles. The Town provides municipal services, including public safety, planning and zoning, and beach management, while KICA manages gate access, its infrastructure, ponds, common areas, and property owner amenities. KIGR and KP, as well as EDENS at Freshfields, represent additional stakeholders whose operations intersect with both municipal and community association functions. This multi-entity governance and stakeholder structure requires ongoing communication and strategic alignment to balance municipal priorities, property owner interests, resort operations, and commercial development objectives as these relationships continue to evolve.

Recommended Actions

The following recommendations support the objective to strategically guide Kiawah's future development:

1.1 Establish the Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA): Create a formalized mechanism for enhanced coordination, integration, and relationship

management among Kiawah's stakeholders. At a minimum, this encompasses the Town and KICA as the Island's principal governance entities, as well as the major owners and developers (currently, KIGR and KP). Over the next decade, investment plans and priorities among these players are likely to evolve, further underscoring the need for continued coordination and transparency.

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

- Facilitating long-term strategic discussions about Kiawah's future
- Identifying opportunities for policy alignment and collaboration
- Addressing emerging issues and interdependencies among stakeholders
- Promoting open dialogue and understanding among diverse island entities

Priorities include working as a group to advocate for the needs of Kiawah and the broader community especially as it relates to vehicular as well as access to key services (i.e., grocers, medical care, restaurants) with development that remains consistent with overriding principles of living with nature.

The composition of the KIA may include representatives from Town Council, KICA, Kiawah Partners, KIGR, Land Conservancy Organizations, EDENS (Freshfields Village), and county or state agency liaisons as needed.

1.2 Establish a Town Redevelopment Task Force:

To prepare for upcoming redevelopment activities, a task force should evaluate current and future plans for single-family residences, multi-family developments, commercial projects, and other properties within town limits. This task force would develop a plan to incentivize and identify existing ordinances and enablers or impediments that affect Kiawah's long-term redevelopment. A comprehensive redevelopment process and

toolkit should be created to streamline permitting procedures.

1.3 Enhance Proactive Kiawah Advocacy : This Comprehensive Plan identifies multiple issues and dependencies on improvements to roads and infrastructure outside the direct authority of the Town. This underscores the need for the Town to consider strategies to more proactively coordinate with County, State and Federal entities to advocate for needed investments to support current and future growth within Johns Island and the Town. .

2. **KiawahNext: Community Experience**

Vision: Kiawah, developed with a nature-forward plan and world-class golf amenities, was destined to attract people searching for a place to live or vacation. At end-stage development, with only one way to enter and exit the Island, and an increasing number of residents and visitors, maintaining a balance between natural beauty and development, while also balancing these resources among different stakeholders, is imperative for the Island’s preservation. Working collaboratively is essential for the next decade.

Understanding Our Community

Kiawah’s Audience: With approximately 4,400 residential dwellings and 354 hotel rooms available today, an additional 700-plus dwellings and approximately 300 hotel rooms are expected to be built in the next 10 years. Despite overlapping in many categories, Kiawah’s residential community consists of:

Visitors: Kiawah hosts short-term and long-term visitors. Estimates indicate that Kiawah had approximately 300,000 visitors in 2024. These numbers are concentrated significantly between Memorial Day and Labor Day, and again at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year.

Accurately tracking visitor trends is challenging. Recorded rental passes show modest increases; however, these figures significantly undercount actual visitor activity, as the Resort and most property management companies issue passes independently. The true scale of visitor growth remains largely invisible in official counts.

Residents:

- **Full-time Residents:** Kiawah is home to over 2,000 full-time residents, with an annual growth rate of 2.4 percent.

- **Part-Time Residents:** Kiawah’s single and multi-family properties are home to approximately 7,000 part-time residents. Part-time residents often have usage patterns that closely mirror those of visitors. However, a significant portion of Kiawah’s part-time residents are using amenities more regularly, indicating that they spend more days on Kiawah. This trend has continued beyond COVID.

- **Population Mix and Shifts:** Multiple distinct population segments comprise Kiawah’s community, each with different needs, usage patterns, and impacts:

- Homeowners
 - Full-time residents
 - Part-time residents
 - Part-time residents who rent their properties
- Off-Island Homeowners
 - Various forms of Kiawah access (Kiawah Island Club, Governors Club)
- Visitors
 - Short-term visitors (up to one month)
 - Longer-term visitors (one month or more)
 - Day visitors (dining, beach, golf, and other activities)

Commercial and Business:

Many businesses and organizations, large and small, support the Kiawah Community, with significant inflows of service providers through the main gate daily.

Kiawah’s Stakeholders

Town of Kiawah Island: The Town is responsible for core municipal functions, including public safety, beach management, planning and zoning, building services, and maintenance of public roads

and leisure trails from the Kiawah-Seabrook Island traffic circle to the main gate and Beachwalker Drive.

Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA):

The Island’s primary property owners’ association operates the main and secondary security gates, manages amenities ranging from the leisure trail and roads behind the main gate to boardwalks, enforces KICA’s regulations, and maintains common areas.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR): The Resort provides and manages approximately 36% of the Island’s lodging and amenities, including five golf courses with a sixth proposed off the island, tennis and pickleball courts, and pools and exercise facilities. KIGR also owns Island restaurants and provides many of the special events and programming, including the Governors Club. Furthermore, it is the largest owner of undeveloped land on the Island, with over 100 acres available for future amenities, hotel rooms, and possible cottages. KIGR extends beyond the Island with Oak Point Golf Course at Kiawah River Estates. Owners in this community have the option of joining the Governors Club, which provides access to KIGR amenities on Kiawah. KIGR-related entities also own Andell West, a future commercial site.

Kiawah Partners (KP): In 2013, South Street Partners acquired Kiawah Partners, including the remaining assets on Kiawah Island. KP manages Kiawah Island Real Estate and the Kiawah Island Club, a membership-based club providing two golf courses (two on the island with a third proposed) as well as other recreation and dining facilities. The site of KP’s new third golf course, Orange Hill, is located on Johns Island and will feature 120 homesites, possible 68 short-term rentals and additional land for purchase, with Kiawah Island Club membership available. The two off-island locations provide access to Kiawah.

Freshfields A commercial center owned by EDENS, primarily serving Kiawah, Seabrook, and the lower portion of Johns Island. It’s home to a grocery store, a hotel, restaurants, banks, healthcare providers, and general retail outlets. Additionally, Seafields, a luxury senior living community with 106 units, is scheduled to open in late 2025. Many of the residents will have access to the Island through their Kiawah Island Club membership.

MUSC: The MUSC Health Kiawah Partners Pavilion is expected to help meet the demands of the Sea Island community upon its completion in 2025.

Broader Community: Kiawah’s community is relatively small compared to the broader Charleston County area. Many of Kiawah’s challenges over the next decade will require collaboration with Seabrook Island, Johns Island, and Charleston County, as the Town and KICA advocate for transportation improvements. Growth in all these communities has accelerated over the last five years, with Johns Island’s population reaching 24,874 in 2023, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.7%.

Preserving Community Experience

Since our community comprises a mix of visitors, with approximately 300,000 visiting each year, and residents, it’s crucial to balance the demands on our town’s resources. This means finding a balance between maintaining quality and appeal while also supporting our stakeholders. We are increasingly facing challenges in several areas:

Traffic: With the significant growth in the Charleston region and strong residential development on Johns Island, traffic beyond the Kiawah traffic circle has become a more significant issue. Approximately 60% of respondents to the KiawahNext survey (conducted from February to July 2023) cite traffic flow and congestion as either a weakness or a significant weakness.

Natural Resources: Much of Kiawah’s allure is its natural beauty, including ten miles of beach, maritime forest, ponds, tidal streams, and river frontage. The Town has a population of shorebirds, eagles, bobcats, alligators, and deer, combined with ocean and river life. The Town works to protect these resources through shoreline protection and support for wildlife. Appropriately maintaining and supporting existing programs will be increasingly important as the Town’s population continues to grow and climate change challenges the shoreline, flora, and fauna.

Dining and Shopping: While the proximity of quality dining and shopping is important to both visitors and residents, it is cited as a weakness or great weakness by approximately 40% of the KiawahNext survey respondents (February through July 2023). Since the 2023 survey, Freshfields has experienced restaurant and shopping closures, which have made this a more significant weakness. Furthermore, the Andell West retail center is not scheduled to come online until 2029 and will include little more than a large grocery store, as the restaurant row has been delayed to a later phase.

Amenities: KIGR, KP, and KICA provide many of the Island’s outdoor and active amenities, including golf, court sports, access to docks for boating, and pools. KIGR and KP both have plans to expand and renovate their amenities, with two golf courses in the planning stages. KIGR is redeveloping its court sport facility at the Roy Barth Tennis Center with the addition of a bar and casual dining area. The need for additional and updated amenities will continue; however, stakeholders are addressing this issue.

Tourism Support: Kiawah benefited from the COVID-19 tourism boom but has also hosted many special events and conferences, including the 1991 Ryder Cup, the 2012 and 2021 PGA Championship, 2031 PGA Championships, the annual Kiawah Island Resort Marathon, and other

active, culinary, and cultural events. Many of these are hosted by KIGR and draw visitors to Kiawah while also introducing potential property owners. Additionally, EDENS hosts events at Freshfields that draw visitors and residents from Kiawah, Seafields, and the lower part of Johns Island, serving as a regional hub that extends the tourism and community benefits beyond Kiawah itself. Tourism at manageable levels is crucial for the long-term viability of Kiawah.

Recommended Actions

2.1 Enhance proactive strategies to manage traffic, a significant driver of community experience:

This should include updating the Kimley-Horn traffic study at the main gate, along Kiawah Island Parkway, and Beachwalker Drive to understand traffic patterns, including timing and types of access. This effort should recognize Kiawah’s limited resources burdened by continued demands on access, and focus on ways to better manage the safety of residents and visitors on Kiawah.

This would also encompass addressing alternatives for “choke points” on the island (Main Gate, Freshfields, Kiawah/Seabrook roundabout). This is a critical topic, also directly affecting resiliency in emergency situations. As a follow-up to the Kimley-Horn and Associates study, the Town should consider additional studies to identify new and future areas for improvement. Currently, there are several known “choke points” on Kiawah: the main gate, Freshfields, and the Kiawah/Seabrook roundabout. Under routine circumstances, these areas are busy with traffic, and access to and from Kiawah can be delayed. Ongoing development in West Beach should be considered in the study, allowing for proactive planning to minimize additional concerns. The Town can collaborate with KICA, KIGR, EDENS (the owner of Freshfields Village), Charleston County, and other stakeholders to evaluate alternatives that will improve the flow of traffic into and out of Kiawah.

2.2 Explore development of a tourism commission

to evaluate:

- Maximization of time and dollars spent in Kiawah
- More formalized mechanisms among stakeholders to support options for visitors and residents, providing a captive audience for our community (recreation, entertainment, arts, dining, and education)
- Ecotourism, educational, and adventure-based opportunities highlighting the Live with Nature philosophy while focusing on Kiawah's rich and diverse wildlife population and miles of beach, marshes, river, ponds and lagoons
- Meeting the needs of residents and visitors by concentrating on peak periods and offering suitable Island access to help manage traffic more efficiently when entering Kiawah.

2.3 Build a strategy for future Public Amenities:

Continue to evaluate the variety and magnitude of public amenities for residents, property owners, and visitors, while developing them in a manner consistent with the Living with Nature concept.

2.4 Maintain support for wildlife in Living with Nature initiatives:

- Continue to support the Town's efforts related to environmental stewardship and conservation
- Develop a comprehensive wildlife corridor plan that identifies, protects, and enhances habitat connectivity across Kiawah.
- Better understand ways that end-stage development will impact the increasingly concentrated habitats and movement patterns of wildlife.
- Incorporate necessary native vegetation and buffers while also considering possible targeted conservation areas.
- Identify and prioritize environmentally sensitive lands on and off Kiawah for conservation,

while continuing to collaborate with Kiawah stakeholders to protect wildlife and their habitats.

3. **KiawahNext: Community Infrastructure**

Vision: The Town's infrastructure and privately and publicly owned utilities are essential to the people who work, live, protect, and visit the island. Our infrastructure must adapt to the evolving needs of our community and be able to recover quickly from unforeseen circumstances.

Context: Over the course of this Comprehensive Plan, Kiawah Island may potentially reach full build-out, accommodate more visitors, and see additional commercial development occur, while our environment will continue to change. Each of these changes needs to be considered as we maintain and improve our existing infrastructure.

Recommended Actions

The following actions should be taken to ensure that the Town's infrastructure is ready to meet upcoming challenges:

3.1 Evaluation of our transportation infrastructure under normal and emergency circumstances.

Kiawah must be able to rely on our roads for purposes of ingress and egress from the Island. Kiawah roadways should be evaluated for their ability to manage stormwater and drainage issues, ensuring that our community and first responders have safe access to and from Kiawah in the event of major storms. Part of this effort should consider expanding on the work initiated by KICA's Adaptive Management Plan Task Force to identify additional areas that are prone to flooding and other environmental risks

As part of this, assess alternative use of leisure trails to provide alternative means of transportation in emergency situations. Kiawah has an extensive network of leisure trails. The trails should be evaluated to determine their usefulness for emergency access. Expansion of the leisure trail to allow connectivity with the Betsy Kerrison

Parkway will enable individuals to access other parts of Johns Island, such as the farmstand and hardware store. It could provide minor relief for vehicular traffic.

3.2 Evaluate the capacity, resiliency, and useful life of utilities.

The performance and recovery of utilities and internet during recent significant storms should be reviewed, and areas for improvement should be identified and addressed. The Infrastructure and Public Works Committee should collaborate with our utility and internet providers (electric, water, and cell tower) to conduct a stress test of each system, analyze the results, and assess the potential impact on our community. As part of the test of Berkeley Electric's grid, the Town should request documentation of shutdown and restoration plans and have that information available for community members. This will ensure that the community is aware of what precautions are taken in anticipation of emergencies, as well as the timing of the restoration process. Finally, as our environment changes, consideration should be given to developing a plan with Kiawah Island Utility and Seabrook Island Utility to focus on short- and long-term implications of drought conditions.

3.3 Adapt existing facilities to support future growth and new models and technologies.

As an Island that is approaching full build-out, we are constrained in our ability to add new facilities to accommodate our growing population. The Town's ability to acquire additional property may be limited. Therefore, the Town needs to be creative in adapting its current facilities to alternative uses and ensuring that we make the best use of the space we currently have. With the increased use of EVs on Kiawah, the Town can work with others to strategically locate additional EV charging stations.

These actions will help keep the Town accessible and safe for the entire community.

4. **KiawahNext: Resiliency**

Vision: Fostering and proactively continuing Kiawah’s 50-year commitment to design and development in harmony with nature requires prioritizing resilience in the face of development growth and environmental change. The focus on resilience needs to foster community adaptation and protect the island’s long-term health, safety, essential services, and infrastructure

Context: Kiawah has faced environmental challenges in the past, and these issues are likely to persist for the next decade. Kiawah’s future resilience plans should consider the following factors now to be prepared for these potential future changes.

Kiawah Initiatives: Kiawah has implemented high standards and a Living with Nature approach to address nature-based environmental initiatives through existing actions and ongoing efforts in the following areas:

- Coastal and Marsh Resilience
- Stormwater, Flooding and Water Quality
- Infrastructure Impacts
- Public Safety and Emergency Management
- Community Education

Sea level rise: Based on data available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the sea level in the Charleston, SC area has risen by 10 inches since 1950. The rise has accelerated over the last 10 years, and it is now increasing at a rate of 1 inch every 2 years.

Nuisance flooding: Recent severe storms have caused nuisance flooding throughout Kiawah Island. This has impacted our community’s ability to access and egress the island, as well as our utilities and other infrastructure.

Kiawah and Coastal Engagement: Kiawah

has existing partnerships and alliances with surrounding jurisdictions to monitor and address issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. It is through these relationships that the Town has monitored and implemented successful strategies that have been utilized by other coastal communities.

Recommended Actions:

4.1 Explore the need for a Chief Resiliency Officer role and function to bring all resiliency committees and reporting departments under one office to coordinate resilience-related efforts.

The Resiliency Committee to determine the need for a consolidated Resiliency Plan for the Town touching on all aspects of Resiliency (Comprehensive Plan Elements: Development, Housing, Infrastructure, Emergency Management, etc.) and incorporating current and updated versions of existing plans (Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation, Stormwater Management, etc.). The plan will address how the Town can:

- Monitor changing environmental conditions to determine the need for new initiatives
- Create a framework for the Town to collaborate with stakeholders on projects and programs that mediate the damage from severe rain events (e.g., rain gardens, rain barrels, living shorelines, pervious surfaces)
- Establish resiliency efforts as a line item in the Town of Kiawah Island budget
- Explore funding opportunities at all governmental levels to implement resiliency initiatives

4.2 Develop an ongoing, comprehensive, and collaborative community-awareness program that should:

- Involve key community stakeholders, including

BLUEPRINT

the Town, KICA, KIGR, KIC, Charleston County, and the Kiawah Conservancy

- Use a wide range of media to reach a diverse audience, streamed content, social and printed media, podcasts, etc.
- Consider the establishment of an Ecotourism Plan to promote Kiawah's healthy and extensive natural ecosystem and our rich and diverse wildlife population
- Include resiliency points in the Town's surveys to identify gaps in awareness and areas for focus
- Identify additional areas where the community can be focused on resiliency issues
- Monitor the effectiveness of education and awareness programs and adapt, as necessary, to increase effectiveness

4.3 Integrate cultural resource resilience:

Incorporate historic preservation into resilience planning by identifying and protecting culturally significant sites that may be vulnerable to environmental changes. This includes working relevant community resources to ensure that historical resources like the Bass Pond shell midden site and other cultural assets are considered in the resilience plan.

01 vision

02 process

03 comprehensive plan elements

kiawahnext

part III: elements

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 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:

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. [Not required]

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.

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.

PROCESS

KiawahNext adapts the required elements to Kiawah's Vision:



Display and communicate the processes of unique Town and governance.



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. 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.

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. Engagement sessions were conducted using various means and methods to reach the greatest extent of the Kiawah Island populations possible. This comprehensive approach aims to include perspectives from all segments of the community, fostering a more inclusive and representative planning process.

Community Response

From February until July 2023, the KiawahNext team hosted community engagement events and opportunities, both in-person and digital. This document records and displays the responses to digital and in-person surveys, and examples of community members expressing their goals and aspirations for Kiawah.

The digital survey hosted on the project website had more than 2,800 people visit the site, while 847 individuals responded to

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

#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

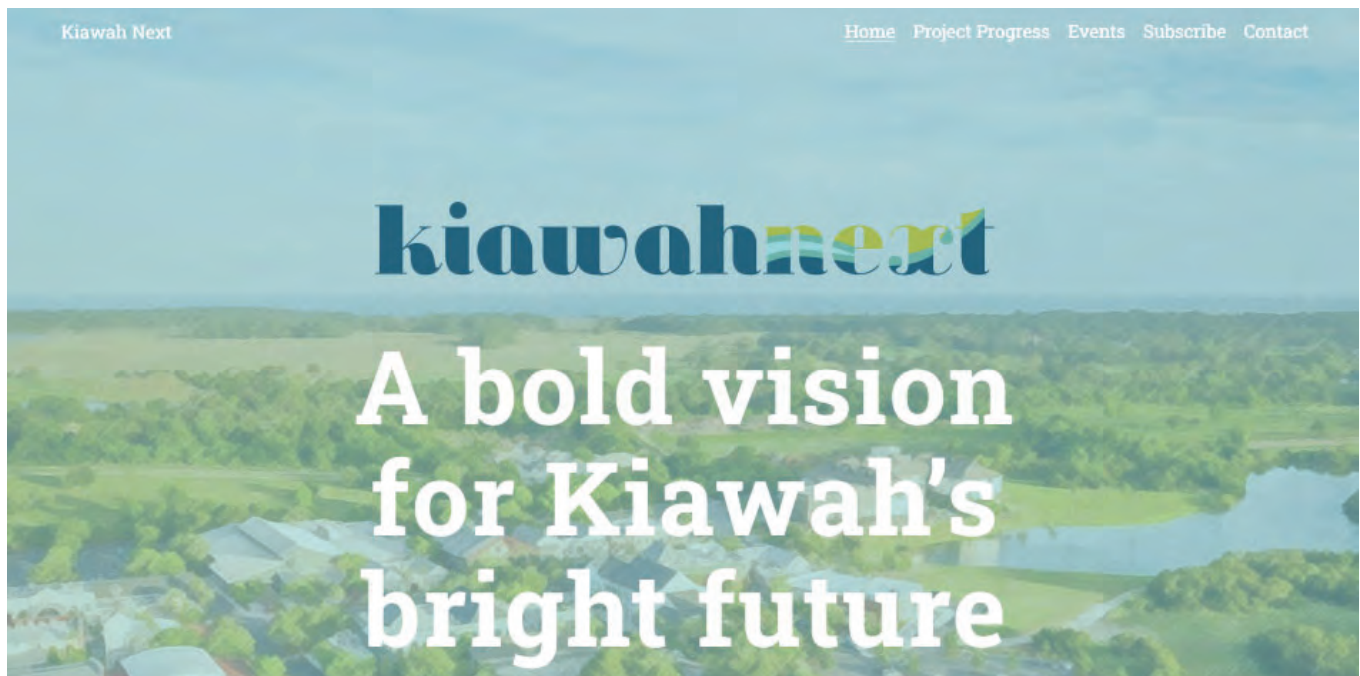
847

Survey Respondents

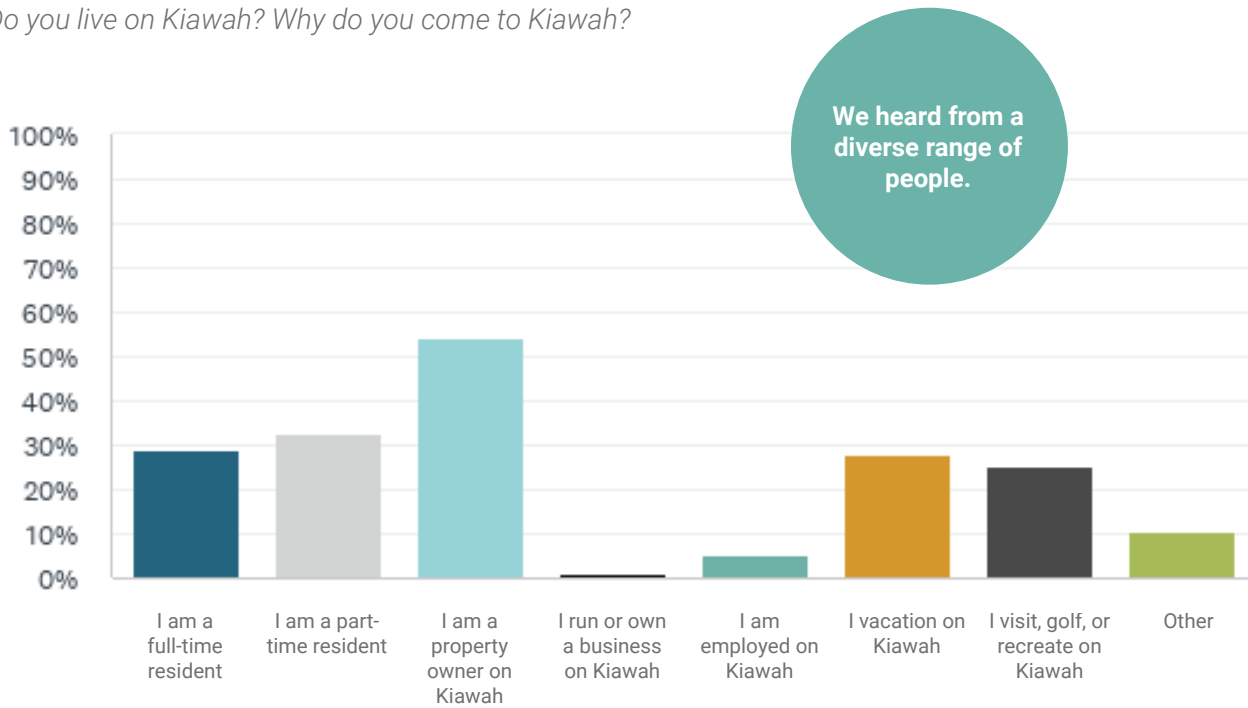
#10,511

Survey Question
Responses

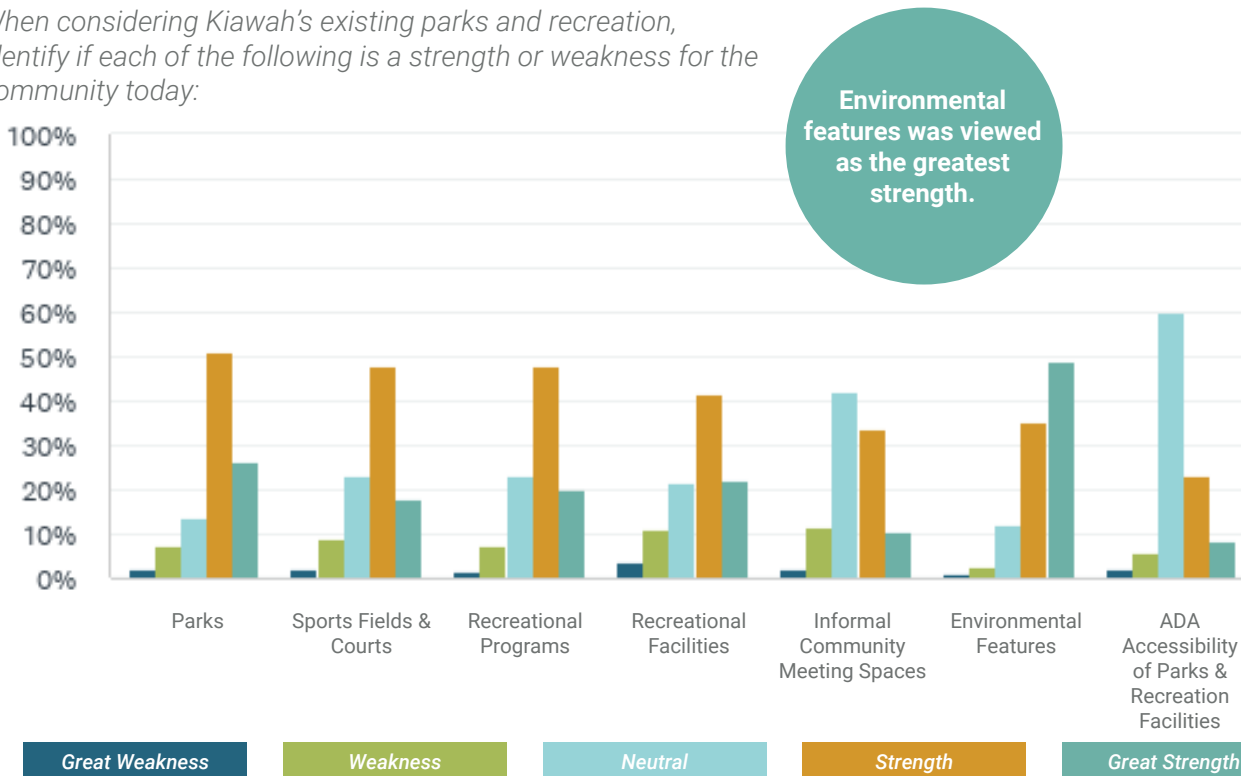
Welcome page to kiawahnext.com for on-line information, surveys, and plan updates.



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

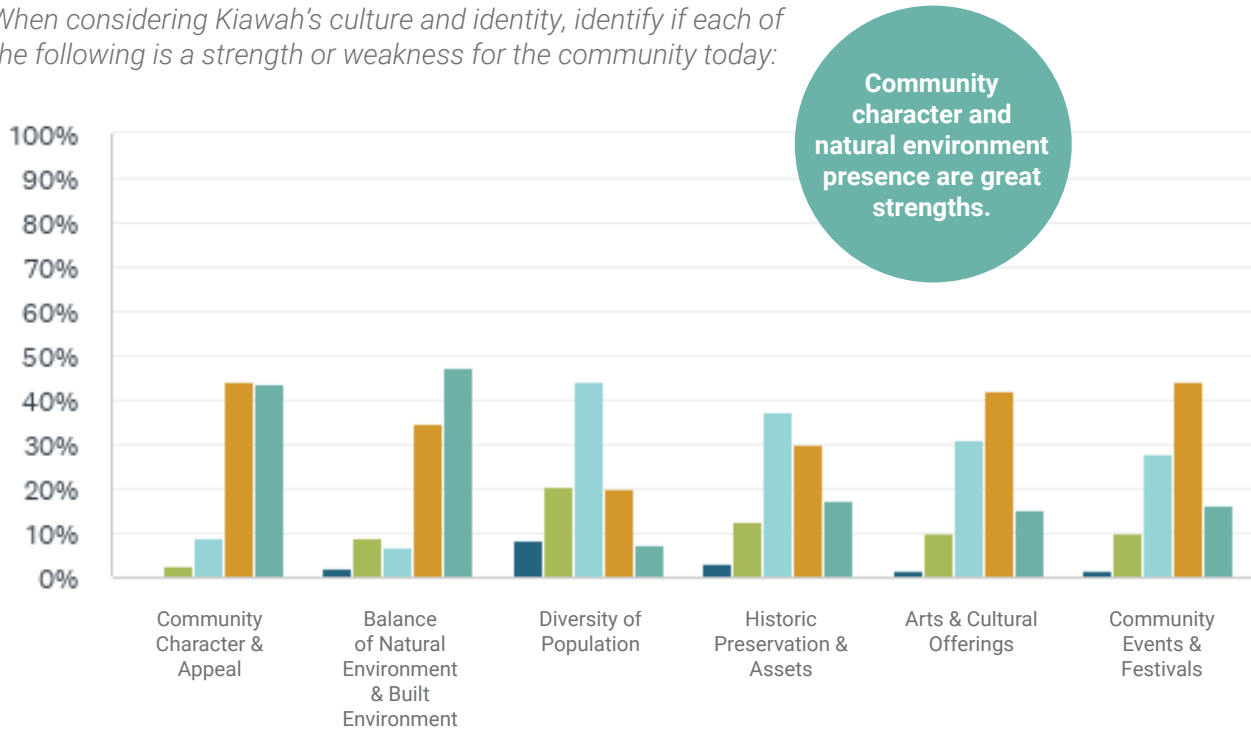


When considering Kiawah's existing parks and recreation, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:

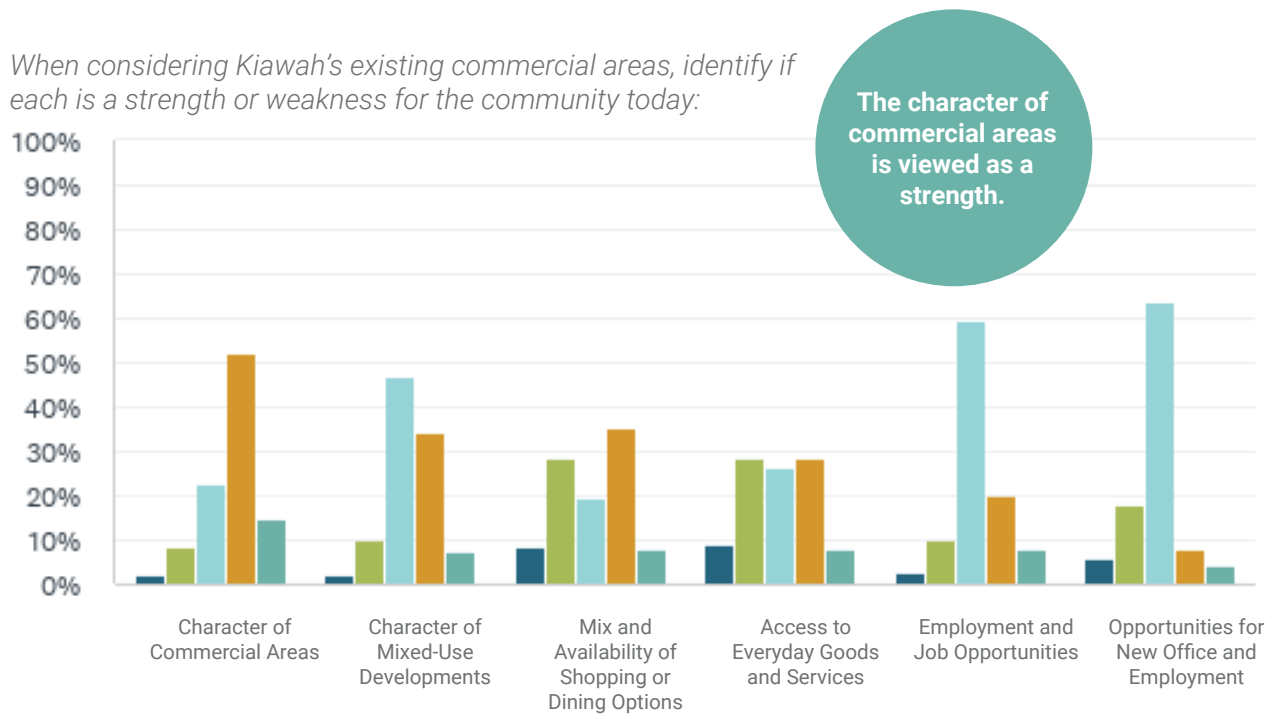


PROCESS

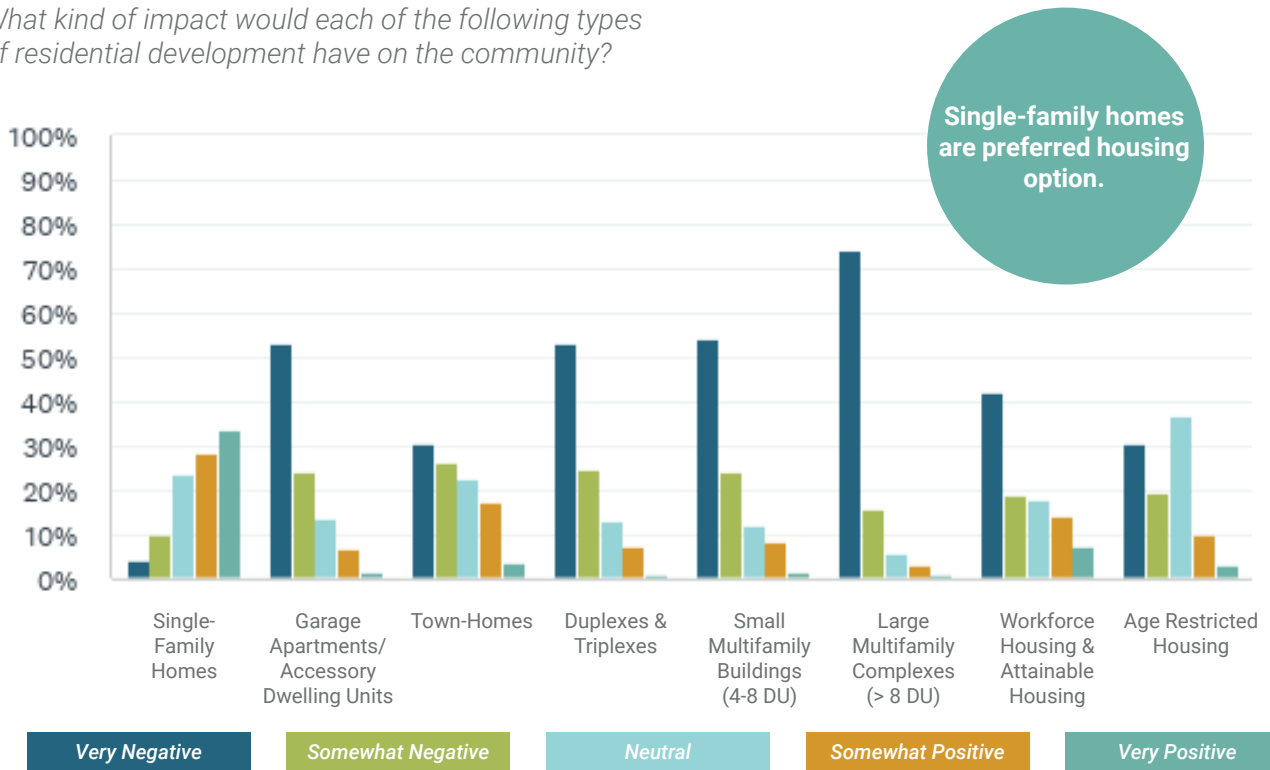
When considering Kiawah's culture and identity, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



When considering Kiawah's existing commercial areas, identify if each 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?



Single-family homes are preferred housing option.

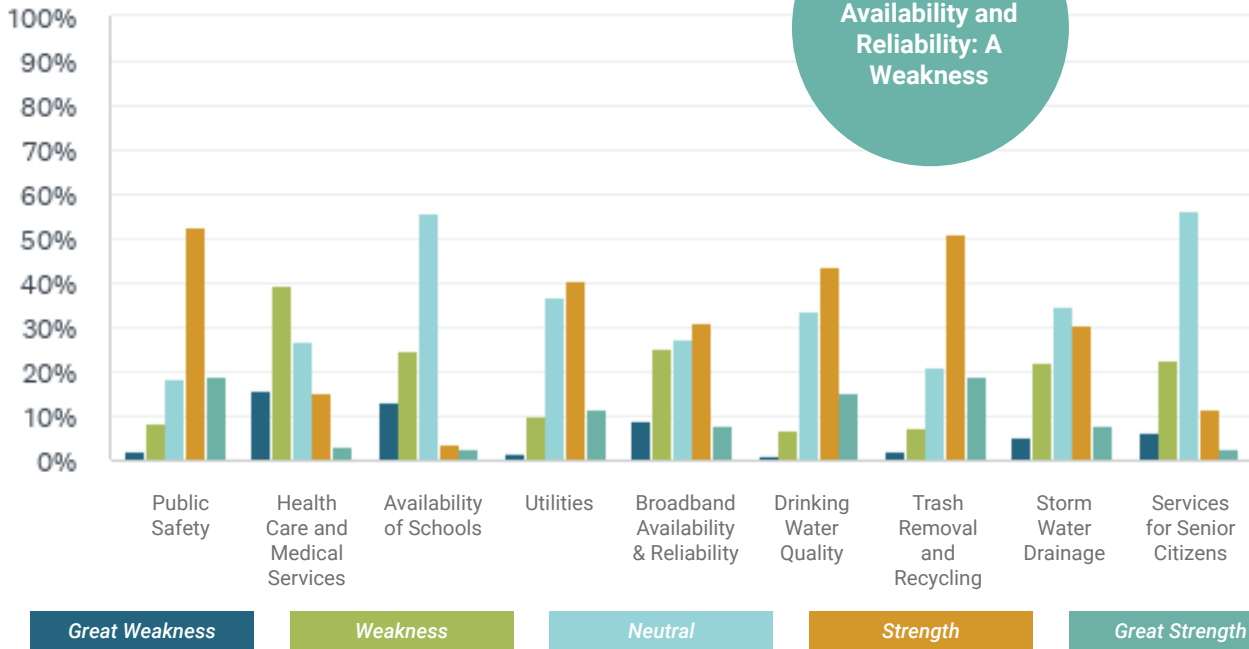
When considering existing housing and residential areas, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for Kiawah today:



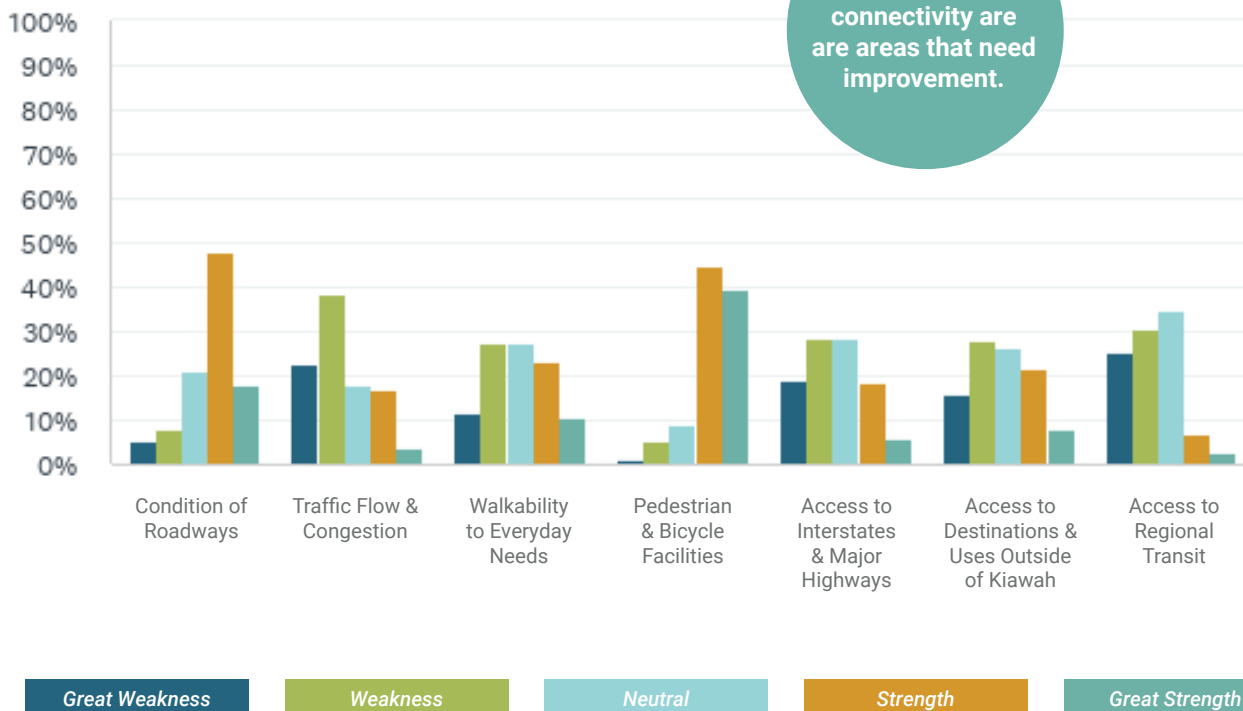
Quality of housing is a strength, but affordability is a weakness.

PROCESS

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. Other adopted plans, studies, and efforts included in this plan:

Town Plans and Efforts

Native Plant Database

An online 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

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 Kiawah's bird population.

White-tailed Deer

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

American Alligators

The survey, conducted annually, covers most of Kiawah's ponds. It records the total number of alligators and estimates their length.

Save Kiawah Bobcats

The Kiawah Bobcat GPS Project is the longest,

continuous GPS study on bobcats in the world and was developed by the Town in partnership with the Kiawah Conservancy, in 2007.

Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan

The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan (CMMP) is envisioned as a living document focusing solely on the marsh and integrating various management tools.

Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update

The Town collected traffic data as well as Intersection and Corridor studies in 2022.

Kiawah Island Housing Market Study

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

Budget at a Glance

The Town'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 aims to formalize a strong commitment by Kiawah's major entities, stakeholders and the community to continue our focus on environmental stewardship, sustainability and the advancement of eco-friendly public and private practices across Kiawah.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

The risk of severe hurricane effects and



Kiawah’s remote location combine to make hurricanes a double threat to Kiawah and its population.

Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation

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

Annexation Policy Plan and 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.

Kiawah Island Stakeholders Plans and Documents:

Kiawah Conservancy 2030 Strategic Plan

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

Kiawah Island Architectural Review Board Standards and Guidelines

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

Kiawah Island Property Report

Kiawah Island Real Estate report reports sales data trends on the island.





West Beach

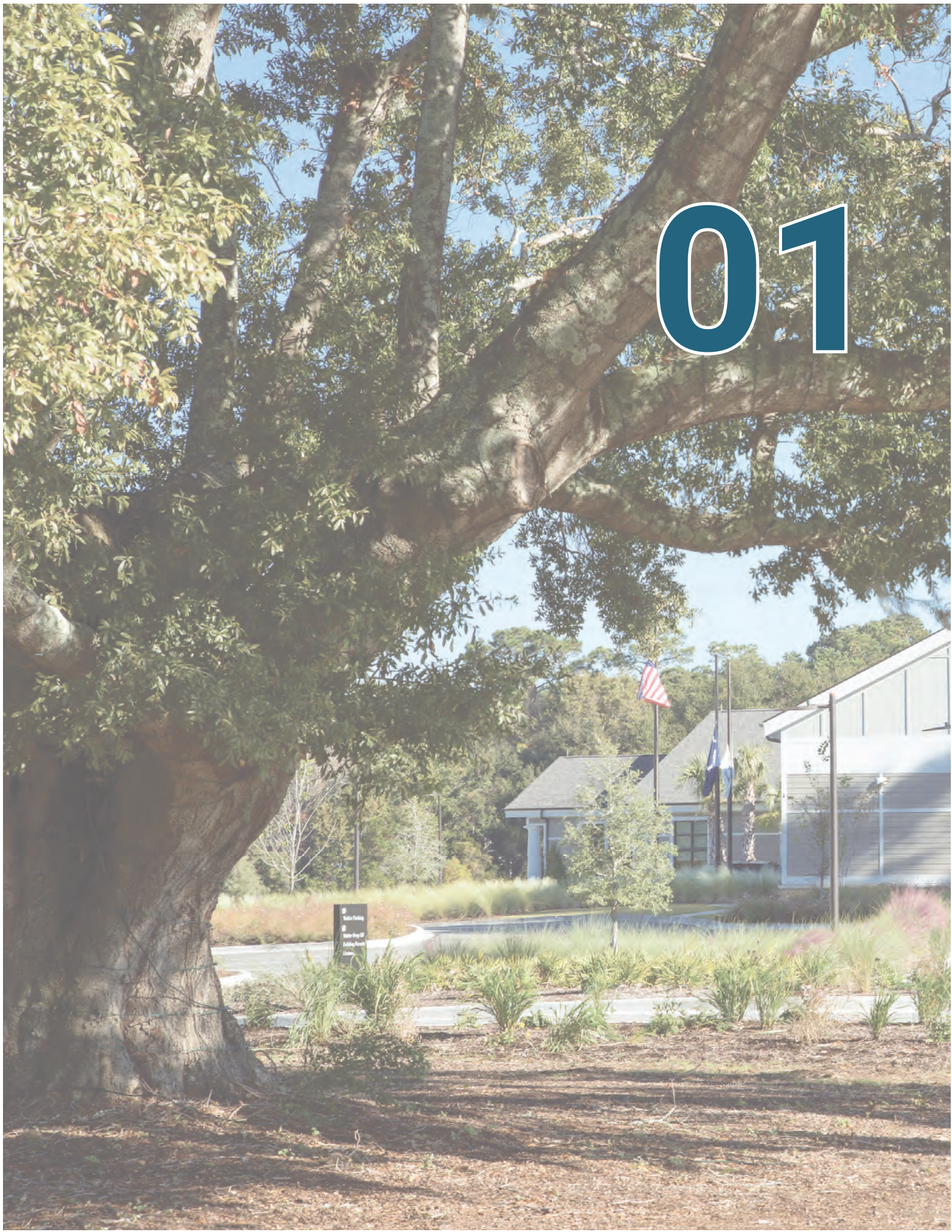
8b

- 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

kiawah**next**

part III: plan elements

01





governance structurenext

Goal: Town's governance framework and community partnerships.

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.

Overview

The Town has a unique governance structure. The Town handles core municipal functions like public safety, planning and zoning, and building services, while KICA manages daily community life, infrastructure maintenance, and amenities.

Effective cooperation between the Town and KICA is essential for addressing Kiawah's key challenges and maintaining the community's quality of life. This collaborative governance model directly impacts decision-making, resource allocation, and community development processes. Understanding how these two entities work together is critical for successfully implementing the comprehensive plan and ensuring that future Town initiatives align with community needs and aspirations through continued coordination with KICA.

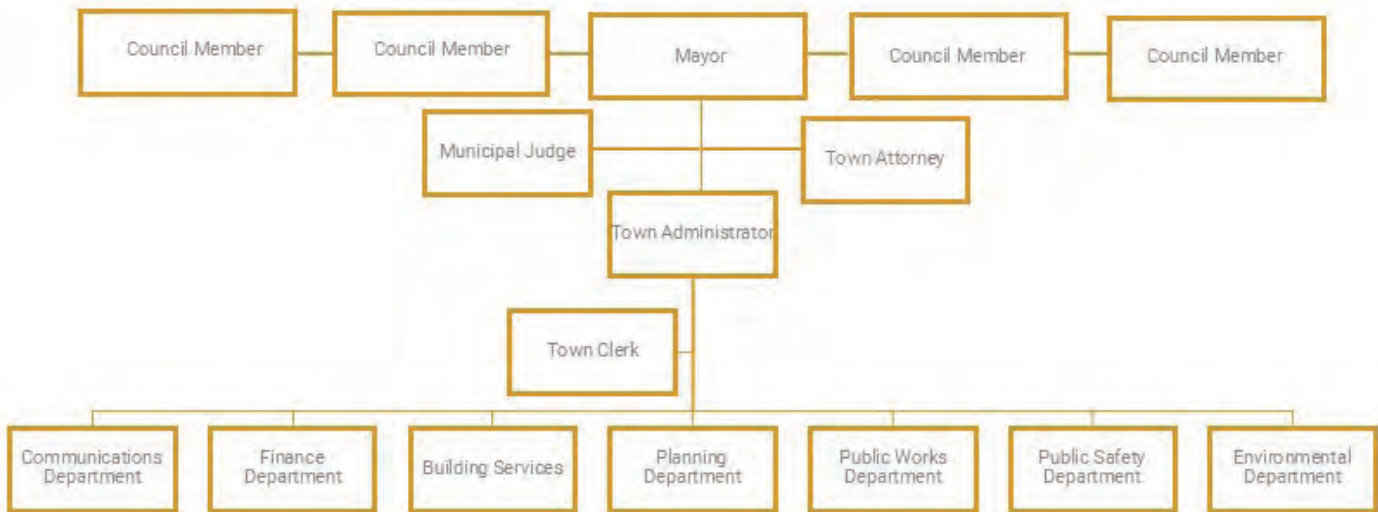
Town Government Structure

Founded in 1988, the Town is run under a Mayor-Council system. The Town Council, comprising a mayor and four council members, establishes policies that govern the town's operations.

The mayor is the chief executive, responsible for implementing Council policies and overseeing Town operations. The Town Administrator assists the Mayor in managing the Town's operations.

The Town utilizes both standing 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



Town Committees

Public Safety Committee

This committee serves as a coordinator for all public safety-related matters on Kiawah, facilitating collaboration among all public safety entities.

Planning Commission

This committee prepares and updates the comprehensive plan, recommends zoning and land development regulations, and develops capital improvement programs.

Board of Zoning Appeals

This committee oversees administrative review, variances, and special zoning exceptions.

Ways & Means Committee

This committee reviews budget and finance, revenue, accommodations tax, contracts, and procurement.

Arts & Cultural Events Committee

This committee provides diverse cultural programs for Kiawah residents and visitors.

Environmental Committee

This committee studies, supports, and recommends environmental issues.

Resiliency Committee

This committee proactively addresses resiliency and sustainability by implementing marsh management and sea level rise recommendations, supporting ecosystem health, and promoting community engagement.

Landscape and Tree Preservation Board

This committee works to protect Kiawah's natural environment for present and future generations, as outlined by a set of standards.

Infrastructure and Public Works Committee

This committee evaluates and recommends improvements to the Town infrastructure, solid waste management and facility operations.

Kiawah Island Stakeholders

Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA)

Established in 1976, KICA is the primary property owners' association, serving over

Town Committees

9,500 members. The association maintains common properties, operates key amenities, and operates the main security gates on the island.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort (KIGR)

KIGR is a major employer on Kiawah with approximately 1,700 employees. The resort features five championship golf courses, including The Ocean Course, and offers dining, spa, and accommodation amenities. The resort has hosted major championships including the Ryder Cup (1991) and PGA Championship (2012, 2021), with plans to host the PGA Championship again in 2031.

Kiawah Island Conservancy (KIC)

KIC implements programs to encourage and assist landowners in protecting Kiawah Island's natural environment. As of June 2025, the Conservancy has preserved 79 properties totaling 3,869 acres of pristine natural habitat, representing approximately 40% of Kiawah Island.

Kiawah Partners (KP)

In 2013, South Street Partners acquired Kiawah Partners and Kiawah Island Real Estate. This acquisition also included the Kiawah Island Club, which operates two private golf courses, tennis facilities, and dining venues.

Unique Governance Model

Kiawah Island governance structure sets it apart from traditional communities. Unlike most towns, Kiawah Island's governance is shared between two primary entities: the Town and KICA. The Town functions as a conventional municipal government,

responsible for core public services and policymaking.

KICA, as the primary homeowners' association, manage some aspects of daily community life that typically fall under municipal purview in other towns. KICA maintains roads and bridges behind the gates, drainage systems (ponds), and common areas, operates key amenities, and provides HOA security services.

This structure allows for specialized focus and expertise in both municipal affairs and community management. The Town 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.

Other stakeholders play a critical role in oversight and development on Kiawah, including KP and KIGR. As a developer, KP influences the Kiawah's growth, while KIGR contributes significantly to tourism and recreation.

This governance structure requires collaboration among these entities to enable Kiawah to maintain its high living standards, preserve its natural environment, and address the unique needs of full-time and part-time residents and visitors more 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 structure also provides multiple avenues for resident involvement on Town

Council and KICA board, commissions and committees, fostering a strong sense of community engagement. This multifaceted approach to governance requires balancing public administration with private community oversight to achieve a well-managed, environmentally conscious, and desirable place to live and visit.

KICA Roles and Responsibilities

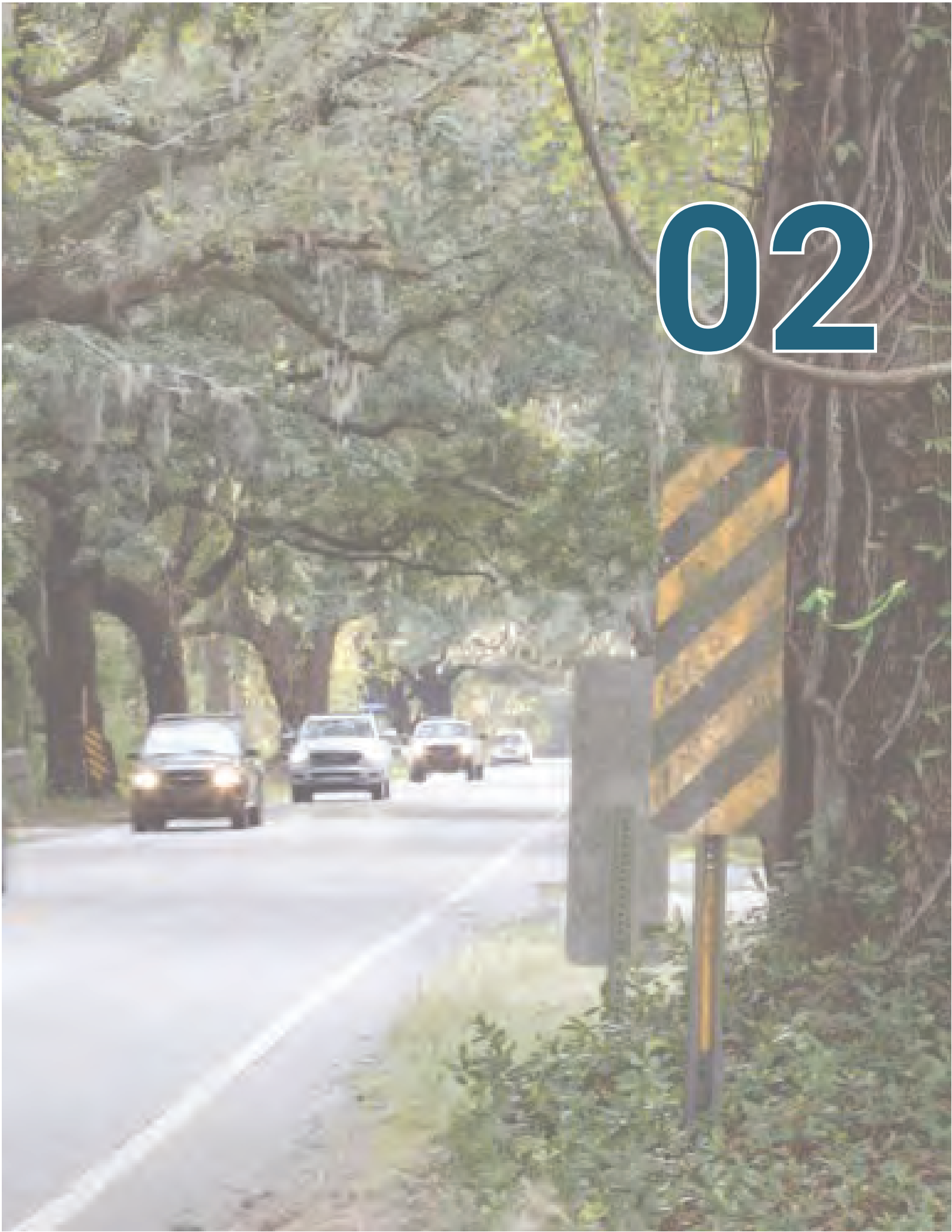
The Association’s Board of Directors, elected by property owners, establishes policies and provides oversight for KICA’s operations. This governing body ensures that association activities align with residents’ needs and expectations.

Key staff members, including a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and a Director of Operations, implement Board policies and oversee daily operations. These professionals manage association activities and execute the Board’s directives.

KICA also employs committees and task forces composed of community members, board members, and staff. These groups provide specialized expertise and address specific projects while advising on operational matters.

This governance structure ensures active member participation in community decision-making, promoting transparency and community engagement.

02





populationnext

Goal: Plan for Kiawah's Population.

Population

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

Overview

Kiawah's population profile is characterized by a blend of full-time residents, part-time homeowners, and Visitor, both traditional vacation / holiday visitors as well as short-term or day visitors. While some growth is expected in the full time population, over the coming decade, the greatest level of growth is expected in the visitor segments. In particular, given new residential developments outside the main Kiawah gate that afford some level of access to Kiawah through venues such as the Kiawah Island Resort and Kiawah Island Club, the day population is emerging as a distinct segment.

Kiawah is located within John's Island, whose population growth rates far exceed that of Kiawah's, with associated stresses on roads and other infrastructure.

Accordingly, Kiawah's population and density

This dynamic community 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 demographics by 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 Growth on Kiawah and Johns Islands

Since 2000, Kiawah Island’s full-time¹ resident population has grown from 1,163 to 2,066 in 2023, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.4%. Kiawah’s population grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many sought less densely populated areas with natural amenities.

In addition to full-time residents, approximately 7,000 part-time² residents who own second homes or vacation properties are seasonal residents. These 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 a permanent and second-home community, presenting unique challenges for long-term planning and resource allocation.

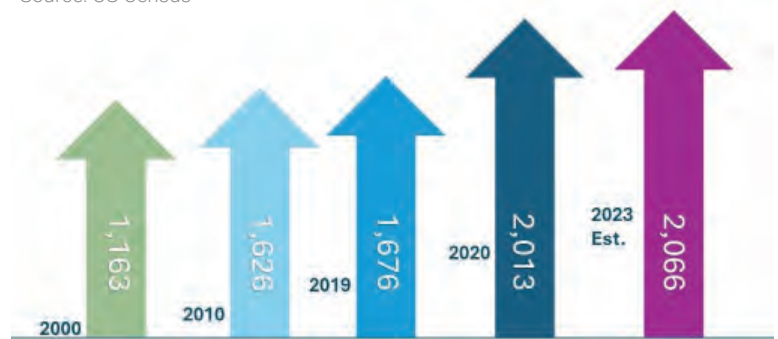
Nearby Johns Island has experienced even more rapid growth. Its population increased from 8,607 in 2000 to 24,874 in 2023, a CAGR of 4.72%. This growth highlights Johns Island’s expanding residential appeal.

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. Transportation infrastructure demands particular attention, requiring close

collaboration between Charleston County, the City of Charleston, and the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to address increasing traffic volumes and ensure safe, efficient mobility throughout the area. This multi-jurisdictional approach to traffic management and infrastructure planning is essential for implementing cohesive solutions that serve year-round residents and seasonal visitors.

Population Growth, Kiawah Island, 2000 - 2023

Source: US Census



¹ 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

² 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

The Town of Kiawah Island is experiencing a demographic shift that will influence long-range planning as its full-time resident population is 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 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.

The Town of Kiawah Island exhibits a unique multigenerational dynamic that 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 ages throughout the year.

This diverse visitor³ profile includes:

- Families with young children on summer beach vacations
- Young professionals looking for luxury getaways
- Groups on golf and tennis retreats
- Retirees exploring potential retirement locations
- Multigenerational family groups gathering for reunions or holidays
- Day visitors who are residents of off-island properties affiliated with the Kiawah Island

Resort or are members of the Kiawah Island Club, who gain access to these relationships.

The interplay between the older resident population and the diverse age range of visitors creates a dynamic environment that requires flexible comprehensive 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 proposed 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.

The Town of 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 more 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.

³ 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.

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 an annual growth rate of about 2.1%. One and two-person households overwhelmingly dominate Kiawah's residential population, accounting for more than 90% of all households. This pattern 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 comprise more than three-quarters of the island's property owners. This mix of full-time and part-time residents has 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.

Neighborly Johns Islands between 2010 and 2023, the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) has grown more rapidly than the Kiawah, adding 4,372 households, an annual rate of 4.3%. This 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 scheduled Fall 2025 opening of Seafields. This development will offer 106 units, including 90 independent living units and 16 assisted living units. Seafields and the adjacent planned MUSC healthcare facility are located off the island but 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 the 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.

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 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 Island Census County Division (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 reporting for full-time residents only.

03





economic developmentnext

Goal: Support the continued vitality of Town's economic ecosystem

Economic Development

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

Overview

The Town's economy is primarily driven by tourism and service industries. These sectors generate significant revenue and employment opportunities, though job trends fluctuate seasonally.

Kiawah's appeal as a vacation destination attracts visitors who support local businesses and generate regional revenue. Many visitors become full—or part-time residents, further growing the local economy.

This chapter examines the Town'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 the quality of life for residents and visitors and secures its long-term appeal as a premier residential and vacation destination.

Job Density and Employer Overview

According to 2023 ESRI estimates, Kiawah directly sustains approximately 6,500 jobs across all employers and sectors. The workforce centers on hospitality, with Accommodations and Food Services comprising nearly half of all positions, followed by Retail Trade at 25%. As the island's largest employer, the KIGR employs 1,700 people and ranks the eighth-largest private employer in the Charleston region. The Kiawah Island Club is another major employer.

Town Revenue

The Town's revenue comprises restricted and unrestricted funds, each playing a crucial role in the Town's financial landscape. The total budgeted revenue for FY24 was \$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 must be used for specific tourism-related purposes:

1. State Accommodation Tax (SATAX) (43% of restricted funds, \$2.9M): Overnight visitors on Kiawah pay a 2% state 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, which Charleston County collects monthly. 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. The revenue must fund tourism-related expenses.
5. Other restricted funds (7% of restricted funds, \$450K).

Usage of Restricted Funds

In FY24, these funds supported 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 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, \$790K)

funds, \$800K): Including court fines, investment income, and miscellaneous sources.

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

Financial Position and Performance

Based on the Town’s FY24 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, the Town maintains a strong financial position:

Financial Highlights

- Total Assets: \$57.7 million as of June 30, 2024
- Total Liabilities: \$5.4 million
- Net Position: \$53.2 million, with \$29.9 million unrestricted

Revenue Performance

- Total revenues reached \$18.5 million in FY24, the highest level in Town history
- Tourism-driven revenues remain strong:
 - Accommodations taxes generated \$5.2 million
 - Business licenses produced \$4.6 million
 - Building permits contributed \$2.6 million

Fund Balance

The Town’s combined fund balance increased to \$40.9 million. This includes:

- \$7.6 million restricted for tourism-related expenditures
- \$9.4 million committed to capital improvements and emergency recovery funding

This stable financial foundation allows the Town to continue investing in infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and tourism-

related amenities while maintaining the high quality of life that attracts visitors and property owners to Kiawah Island.

No Municipal Property Tax

The Town currently does not impose a municipal 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

The property taxes paid by Kiawah property owners 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 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 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 Fees:** 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 Fees:** As Kiawah approaches full development, revenue from new construction permits may decline. However, this could be offset by an increase in renovation permits for older structures.

The mix of restricted and unrestricted funds allows the Town to support both tourism-related initiatives and essential Town services. As Kiawah’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 the Town’s Economy

Tourism plays a pivotal role in Kiawah 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. Employment trends often fluctuate based on seasonal

demand.

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:** Kiawah’s desirability 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 visitors and residents, such as beach maintenance, road improvements, and public facilities.
5. **Regional Impact:** Kiawah’s tourism industry extends beyond the island, contributing significantly to the broader regional economy. Kiawah generates over \$96 million in property tax revenues for Charleston County, funding county-wide services. The economic impact of tourism in the Charleston area, including Kiawah, has grown from \$7.4 billion in 2018 to \$13.1 billion by 2023. This growth has fueled job creation, infrastructure development, and improved amenities throughout the Charleston region.
6. **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.

Understanding these economic patterns helps the Town support and preserve Kiawah’s tourism-based economy while maintaining its unique character. By balancing tourism and

resident needs, the Town can better ensure long-term sustainability.

Over the past two decades, tourism has played a role in Kiawah's economy. Over the past 25 years, the island has transformed 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, and the upcoming 2031 PGA Championship, has elevated Kiawah's reputation as a premier golf destination on the global stage. These events brought immediate economic benefits and 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.

This resilience is particularly evident in the vacation rental market, which has become an important component of Kiawah's accommodations.

From 2018 to 2023, vacation rentals on Kiawah 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'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.

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 Town has implemented various environmental programs and regulations to protect its ecosystems while accommodating tourism growth.

Beyond environmental concerns, tourism has

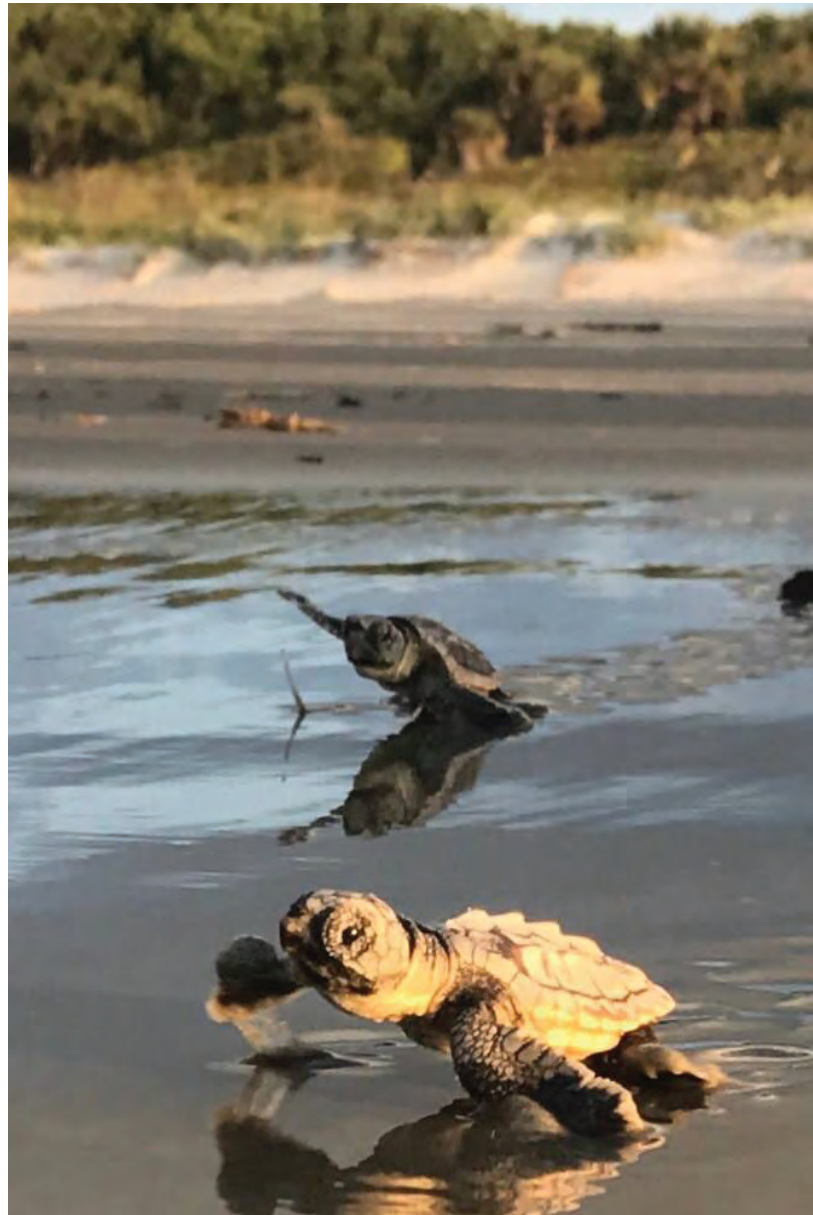
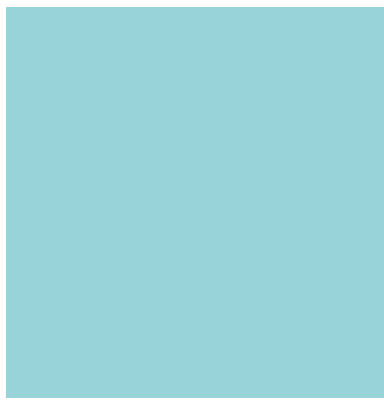
significantly impacted daily life on Kiawah. Traffic congestion has become a critical issue, particularly during peak seasons. The limited road infrastructure connecting the island to the mainland creates bottlenecks, with travel times from Charleston doubling or tripling during high-volume periods. This infrastructure struggles to handle peak traffic volumes, leading to increased maintenance needs and affecting both visitors and residents.

The seasonal nature of tourism has created workforce challenges, with many service industry workers unable to afford housing on or near the island. This has resulted in longer commutes for essential staff and occasional shortages during peak periods.

Looking ahead, the Town is focusing on sustainable tourism practices, aiming to maximize economic benefits while minimizing environmental, infrastructure, and social impacts. Infrastructure planning now incorporates tourism growth projections, with particular attention to traffic management solutions, including potential shuttle services during major events and expanded public transportation options.

In conclusion, tourism has been a transformative force for Kiawah 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)





natural resourcesnext

Preserve 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.

Overview

Kiawah Island, 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, stands as a testament to the community's dedication to preserving this extraordinary environment. With 345 acres of conserved barrier island habitat, the Town underscores a steadfast commitment to sustainability.

The guiding principle, Live with Nature, embodies a vision where human presence harmonizes seamlessly with Kiawah's dynamic ecosystems. This philosophy ensures that the island landscapes remain resilient and thriving, even in the face of pressure from development and rising sea levels.

Live With Nature

Kiawah has always embraced the balance between development and preserving natural landscapes, a commitment dating back to the community's inception in 1974. As the island approaches full development, the focus has naturally evolved from designing with nature to living harmoniously within the established natural environment. This philosophy recognizes that residents are stewards of a unique ecosystem that includes maritime forests, beach, dunes, wetlands, and diverse wildlife habitats.

Kiawah's commitment to environmental stewardship manifests in several key ways. The commitment to wildlife corridors that allow native species, from bobcats to loggerhead turtles, to thrive alongside human residents.

These corridors are protected and maintained through collaborative efforts between the Town and the Kiawah Conservancy.

Water management plays a crucial role in live with nature on Kiawah. The island's sophisticated drainage systems and pond network are designed to work with natural water flow patterns, helping to prevent erosion while providing essential habitat for wildlife. Monitoring of water quality ensures these systems continue to support both human needs and environmental health.

The Town's comprehensive landscape and tree ordinance represents another vital component of this philosophy. 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. A dedicated Landscape and Tree Preservation Board reviews and approves tree preservation plans and handles special circumstances regarding tree removal.

Educational initiatives and community programs help residents understand and participate in environmental stewardship. These programs include wildlife education, native plant workshops, and citizen science projects that monitor local species populations. Such engagement helps create a community-wide understanding of how daily decisions impact the island's ecosystem.

During sea turtle nesting season, regulated beachfront lighting prevents hatchling disorientation. The use of amber LED lights and specialized fixtures shows how simple adaptations can protect wildlife.

Using native species in landscaping is strongly encouraged, not just for aesthetic purposes but to support local biodiversity and maintain

the island's ecological balance. Native plants require less irrigation and maintenance while providing essential habitat and food sources for local wildlife.

Environmental adaptability is integrated into the island's living with nature approach. Natural systems like maritime forests and dunes serve as critical infrastructure that helps protect the island from storms and changing coastal conditions. This recognition influences decisions about infrastructure maintenance and development.

By implementing these comprehensive measures, Kiawah continues to ensure that its human community coexists harmoniously with the island's wildlife and natural beauty. This approach recognizes that successful stewardship requires ongoing adaptation and commitment from all community members to maintain the island's unique character and ecological integrity for future generations.

Environmental Stewardship: Conservation Initiatives and Community Participation

The Town implements targeted programs to preserve natural resources and protect wildlife across its diverse ecosystems:

- **Marsh Management:** Monitoring and preserving our expansive salt marshes is critical in protecting against storm surges and providing habitat for diverse species.
- **Beach and Dune System Protection:** Implementing sophisticated erosion control and dune restoration projects to safeguard 10 miles of beachfront, ensuring it remains a natural barrier against rising sea levels and extreme weather.
- **Natural Environment Preservation:** Maintaining comprehensive landscape and

tree protection ordinances to preserve and enhance Kiawah’s natural character, with special emphasis on specimen trees and grand trees.

- **Wildlife Tracking and Research:** GPS technology and banding programs monitor the health and movement of local species, including bobcats, alligators and sea turtles, to better understand and protect their habitats.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Encourage native plants in landscaping to reduce water consumption and support local wildlife, and promote sustainable building practices that minimize environmental impact.
- **Grow Native Initiative:** Supporting biodiversity through promoting and preserving native plant species throughout the island, creating sustainable habitats for local wildlife.
- **Wildlife Protection Programs:** Implementing specialized programs like Turtle Patrol, Shorebird Stewardship, Marine Mammal Dolphin Strandfeeding and the Bobcat Guardian Program to safeguard the island’s diverse wildlife populations
- **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 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 the 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 everyone stays informed and involved, fostering a profound connection with Kiawah unique ecosystem.

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 for creating rain gardens designed to capture and filter stormwater runoff, promote water conservation, and reduce erosion. These gardens help maintain the island’s natural beauty and ecological balance.

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

Wildlife Research and Monitoring

The wildlife of Kiawah plays a critical role in the health of the fragile ecosystems cherished by residents and visitors alike. To protect these habitats, Town Biologists must consistently understand and monitor the species on Kiawah.

Bird Research

The Town’s Bird Research program is a comprehensive initiative to understand and protect the island’s diverse avian population. Town Biologists conduct various projects, with bird banding as a primary research tool. This technique involves capturing birds and attaching unique identifiers, providing crucial insights into different species’ health, demographics, and movements.

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 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 these colorful birds’ movements, distribution, and population trends.
4. Marsh Sparrow Banding: This winter

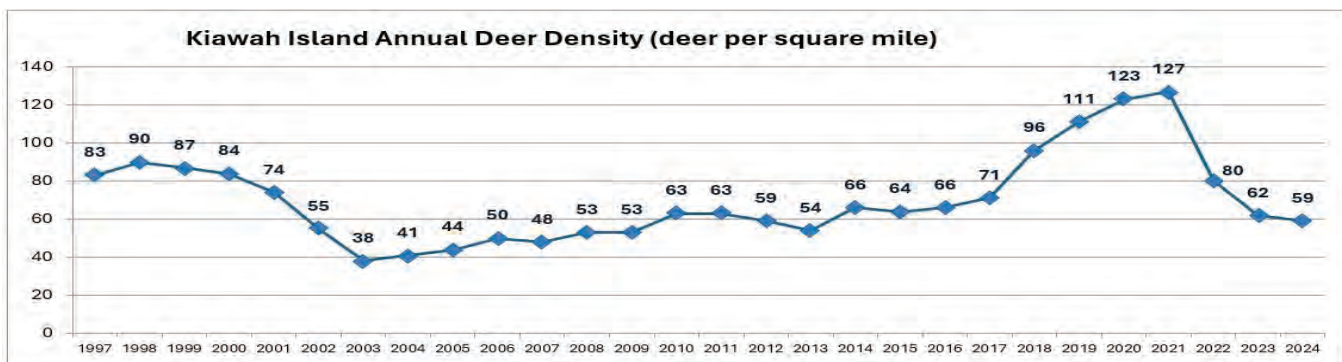
project focuses on three species of coastal sparrows and addresses conservation concerns related to habitat loss and sea-level rise.

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 the avian biodiversity.

White-tailed Deer

Surveys of white-tailed deer population density on Kiawah 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’s vital habitats, which 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 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 and scrub-shrub and dunes for resting. There has been a recent decline of bobcats since 2017 due to second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide poisoning. Public awareness efforts have been made to stop the use of this deadly rodenticide.

American Alligators

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

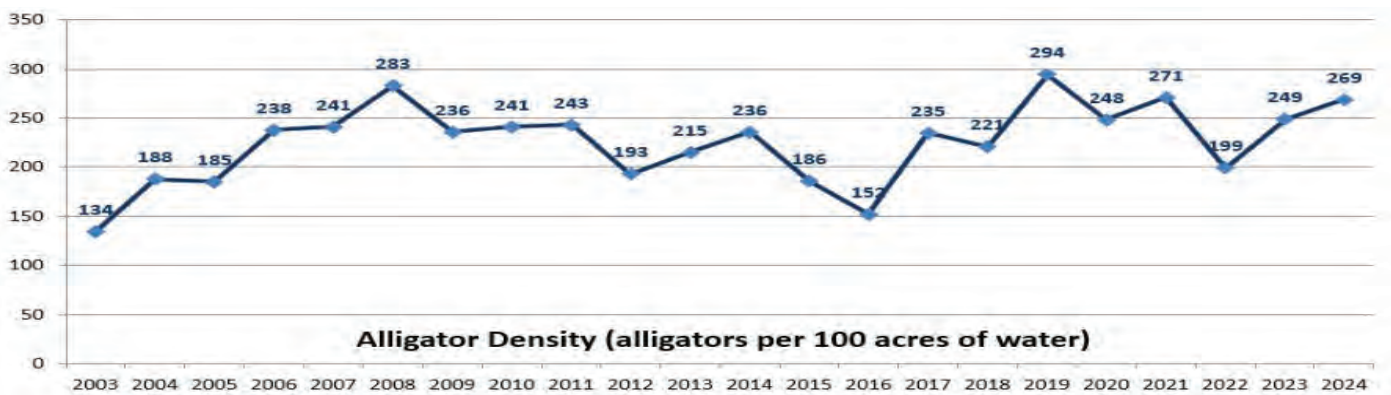
Recognizing the importance of maintaining safe coexistence, the Town and the KICA have implemented a comprehensive research

program. This initiative aims to better understand alligator behavior and movements, 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 population density and distribution data, 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.



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

Turtle Patrol Program

Kiawah is home to an extensive Loggerhead turtle habitat. With over 10 miles of beachfront, it is a vital nesting ground for endangered turtles. The nesting process is especially vulnerable for them; turtles emerge from the Atlantic Ocean each spring 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 Town has supported the group of residents and non-resident volunteers since 1990.

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

Low-lying nests are relocated to protect against tidal wash over. 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.

Shorebird Stewardship Program

Kiawah’s beaches serve as critical habitat for thousands of shorebirds throughout the year, providing essential areas for foraging, nesting, and resting during long migrations. To protect these vital species, the Town established the Shorebird Stewardship Program in 2017, addressing the need to minimize disturbance during these critical life activities.

The program operates year-round with targeted seasonal initiatives. During spring (March-May), efforts focus on protecting Red Knots as they make their migration stops. Nesting shorebird protection is from April through July when species raise their young on Kiawah’s beaches. Fall and winter (September-February) see increased attention on migrant populations using the island’s beaches as stopover points.

Shorebird populations have declined 70% nationally since the 1970s. The program engages beachgoers about habitat needs through trained volunteer stewards, conducts beach patrols, monitors critical areas, and promotes wildlife-friendly practices like leashing dogs and avoiding dunes.



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

Dolphin Education Program

Kiawah is one of a few locations in the United States where bottlenose dolphins exhibit “strand feeding,” a unique hunting behavior where dolphins work together to herd fish onto shore. The Town partners with the Lowcountry Marine Mammal Network to study and protect this rare behavior through a monitoring and education program.

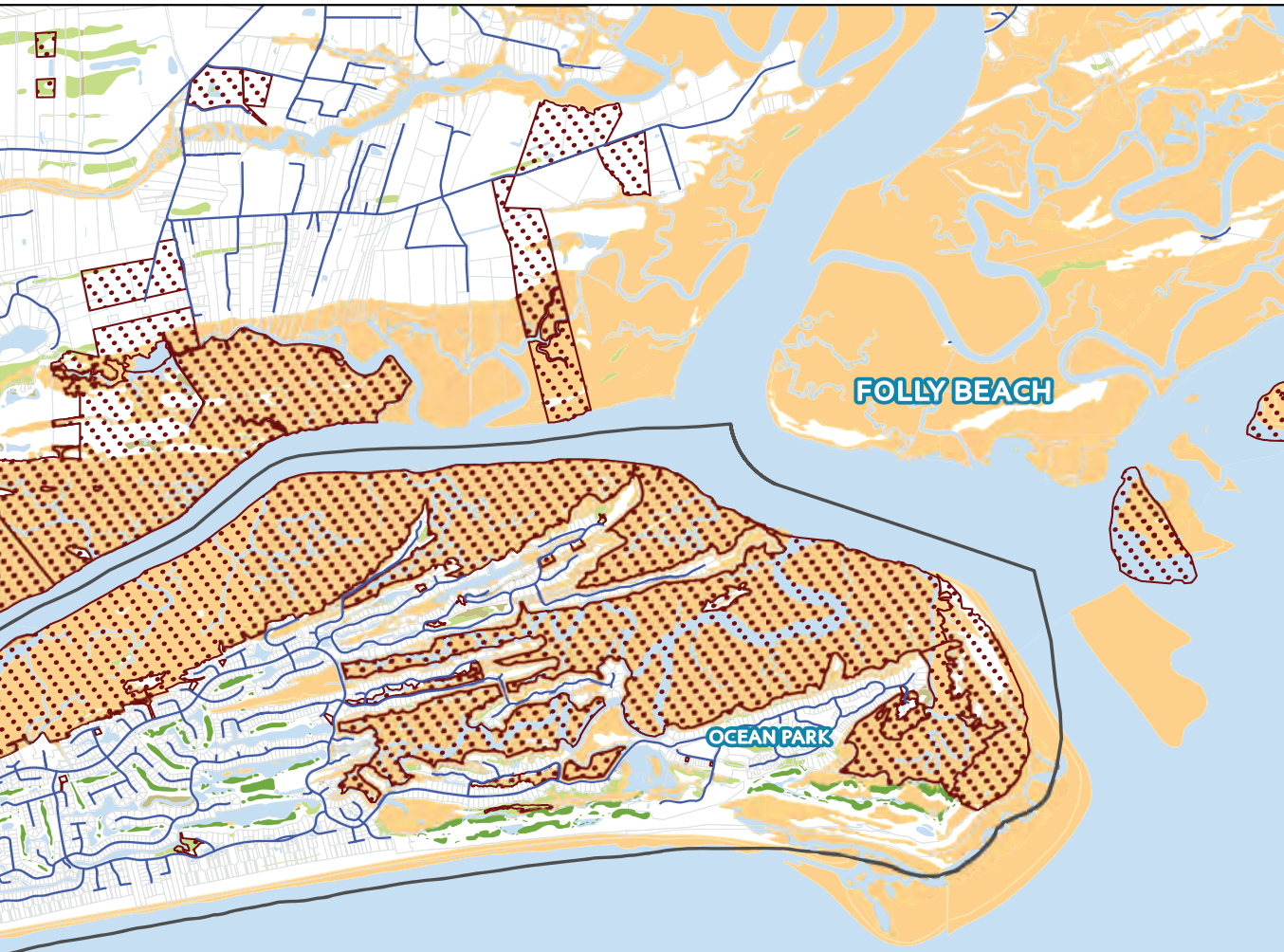
Through this research initiative, twelve individual dolphins have been identified as regular strand feeders in Kiawah’s waters, with some having sighting histories spanning over 20 years. The program has documented critical behaviors, including mothers teaching their young to strand feed and demonstrating the importance of the inlet as an essential habitat for the Charleston dolphin population.

The program combines scientific monitoring with public education to prevent harassment and maintain appropriate viewing distances, as mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Trained educators conduct beach monitoring during peak feeding times,

engage with visitors, and collect behavioral data. This approach has successfully reduced human interference while advancing our understanding of this specialized feeding strategy and its conservation needs.







Habitats & Conservation Land

Kiawah Island is rich with diverse habitats, largely comprising a variety of wetlands, including Estuarine and Marine Wetlands, Freshwater Emergent Wetlands, Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands, and Riverine Wetlands. The beach, marsh, and dunes account for the majority of the island's undevelopable land. There are 4,580 acres of Estuarine and Marine Wetlands and 87 acres of Freshwater Wetlands. A total of 3,990 acres are designated as Conservation Lands, with most of these being Estuarine and Marine Wetlands. Kiawah Island's habitat and conservation efforts extend beyond its municipal boundaries, promoting regional ecological health and contributing to the preservation of interconnected ecosystems.

Beach Management

Kiawah's beach system represents a unique coastal environment along the South Carolina shore, distinguished by its natural accretion pattern rather than erosion. This accretional characteristic is particularly noteworthy as it contrasts with many neighboring coastal areas that struggle with erosion challenges. The beach's growth is facilitated by the Stono Inlet shoals, which function as natural barriers, creating conditions that promote sand accumulation and shoreline expansion. These shoals effectively shelter the eastern end of Kiawah from northeast winds and waves, establishing a zone where sand naturally settles and accumulates.

The oceanfront beach and dune system serve multiple vital functions for Kiawah. As a critical habitat, they support a diverse ecosystem of plant and animal species, many of which are unique to coastal environments. The dune system protects inland areas against storm surges and extreme weather events, acting as a natural barrier that helps safeguard the island's infrastructure and properties. Additionally, the beach provides recreational opportunities and contributes to the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

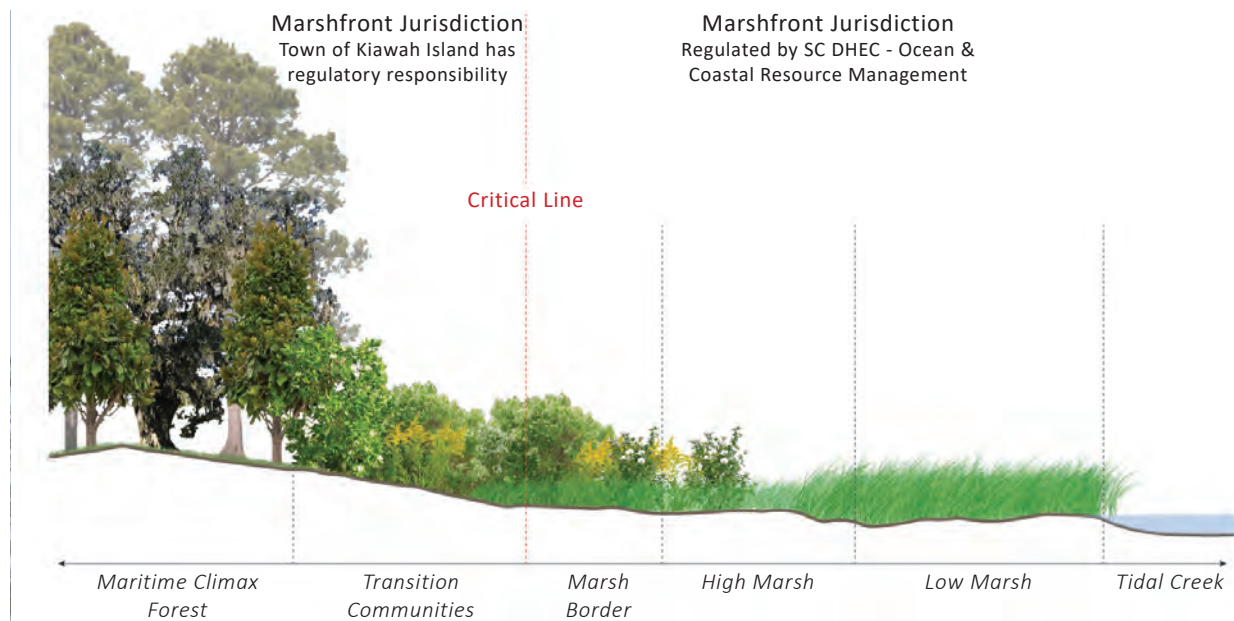
The Town's Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan is a crucial planning and decision-making tool, fulfilling requirements established by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services - Bureau of Coastal Management (SCDES - BCM) for beachfront municipalities. Since its incorporation in 1988, the Town has maintained an active commitment to beach management planning, beginning with its first plan in 1992. Following a 2006 update, the Town conducted a complete revision in 2012, and the current 2020 plan. The next update will occur in 2030.

Through this management plan, the Town

maintains a proactive approach through regular monitoring and strategic restoration projects, primarily executed in partnership with Coastal Science and Engineering. Notable interventions include two major restoration projects on the East End Beach: the 2006 project, which involved the placement of 550,000 cubic yards of sand, and the 2015 project, which utilized 100,000 cubic yards of sand. Both projects addressed erosion concerns near residential areas and the Ocean Course. Following Hurricane Irma's impact, the Town completed a sand scraping project from 2017 to 2018, successfully rebuilding damaged dunes along the beachfront.

Kiawah falls within Phase II of South Carolina's beachfront jurisdictional lines review process, beginning in Spring/Summer 2026. This process is part of the state's ongoing coastal management strategy. The Bureau of Coastal Management establishes and reviews two critical jurisdictional lines - the baseline and the setback line - every seven to ten years. These lines delineate the state's direct permitting authority for activities within the beach/dune system critical area, with the baseline being the more seaward line and the setback line being the landward line.

The jurisdictional lines create a state regulatory framework in which activities such as the construction of habitable structures, pools, erosion control structures, beach renourishment, landscaping, and other developments require review and authorization through SCDES BCM's permitting processes.



Source: *The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan*

Marsh Ecosystem and Management Plan

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

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

In April 2022, the Town 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 the Town Council adopted on February 7, 2023.

Several studies on water quality and wetland health have been conducted to monitor the natural environment of Kiawah:

- 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 burning, resiliency terracing, and oyster reestablishment.

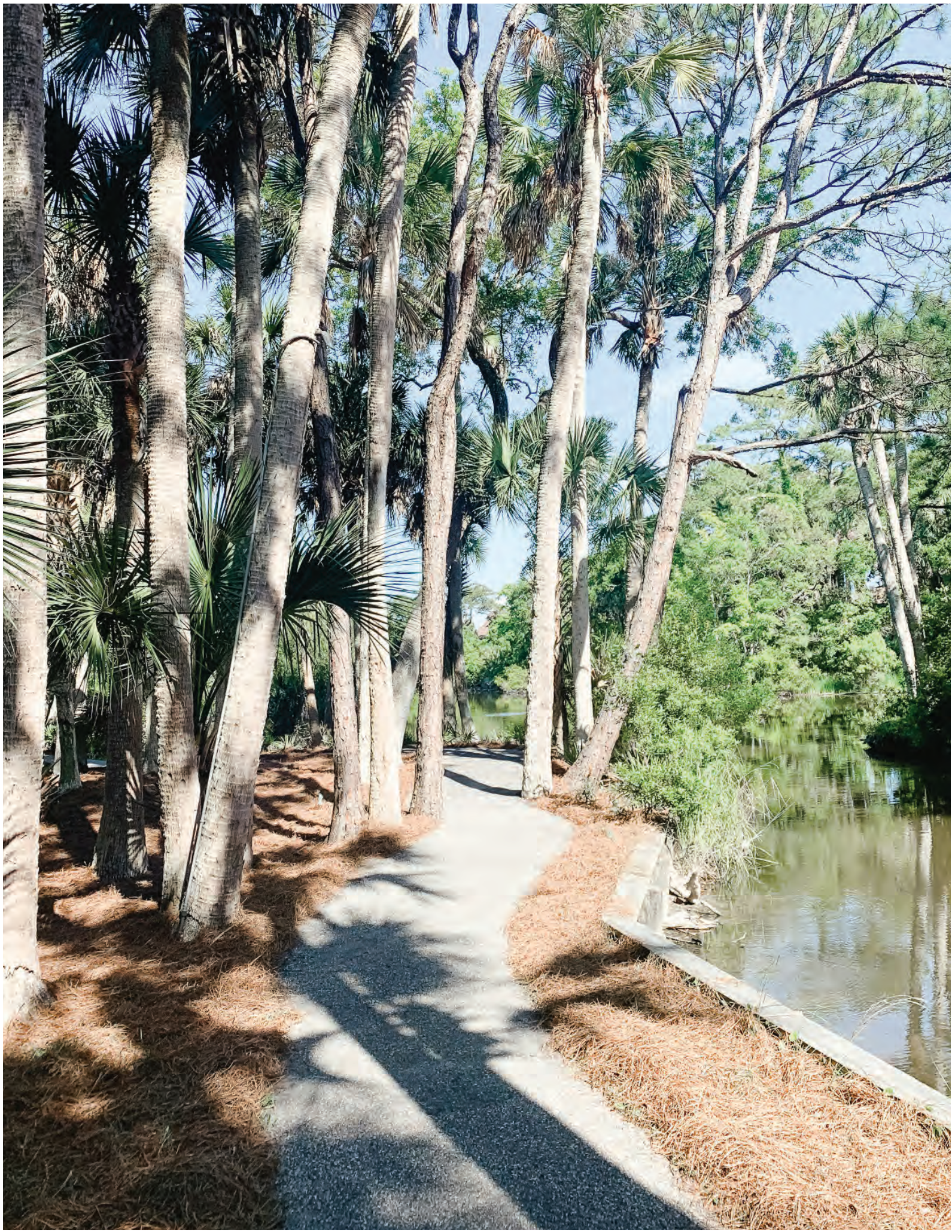
Community engagement is crucial for the success of these efforts, and informed

stewards, through awareness and active participation, play a vital role in marsh preservation.

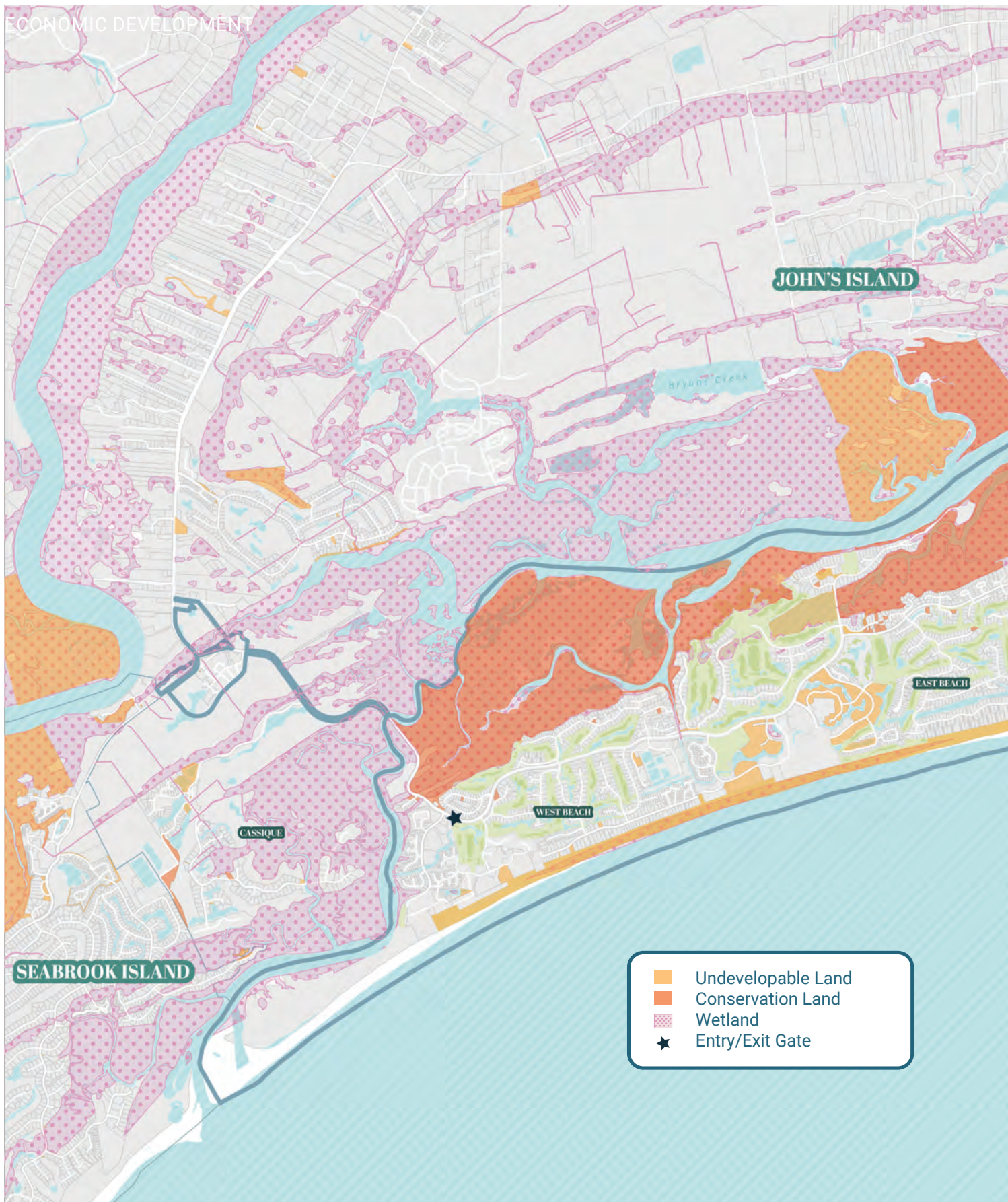
Key Indicators: UVVR & Shoreline Change



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.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT





Wetlands & Protected Land

Kiawah 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 on Kiawah. Undevelopable land includes landscape buffer areas, leisure trails, conservation easements, and preserved natural areas.

Captain Sams Spit

Captain Sams Spit, located at the western end of Kiawah, is an environmentally sensitive and dynamically changing area that plays a crucial role in the island’s coastal ecosystem—Captain Sams Inlet bounds this spit, which is a critical transition zone between Kiawah and Seabrook Islands.

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 spit area is of particular environmental importance due to its role as a habitat for various coastal species, including shorebirds, dolphins and sea turtles. The spit’s dynamic nature, with its changing shorelines and sandbar formations, provides essential feeding and nesting grounds for these species.

Looking forward, the Coastal Science and Engineering report suggests that another inlet relocation project may be considered 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.

East End

The East End of Kiawah 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.

Source: Coastal Science Engineering, Kiawah Monitoring Report, 2023

05





cultural resourcesnext

Goal: Foster community connection and tourism through cultural and historical stewardship

Cultural Resources

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

Overview

This section explores Kiawah’s rich cultural tapestry, from its indigenous origins through colonial times to its evolution as a premier coastal community. It examines historical preservation opportunities, including the potential Kiawah Island Historic Society, while highlighting the Arts and Cultural Events Council’s programming, Art Guild exhibitions, and Freshfields events.

Kiawah’s recreational offerings are detailed—nature programs, the Sandcastle, tennis, and environmental education—alongside its golf and community outreach through the Town’s Charitable Contributions program and “Kiawah Cares.”

Finally, the section addresses a significant gap in community infrastructure—the absence

of public facilities and gathering spaces outside the gate—and explores the potential for a dedicated Town community facility to enhance inclusivity and connectivity. Through this comprehensive examination of cultural resources, the element sets forth the objective of preserving and enhancing Kiawah’s unique heritage and community life for future generations.

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 Island in two halves in 1717 and 1737. Stanyarne, a prominent planter, established a thriving plantation, setting the stage for Kiawah Island 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 Island. 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 Island'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 is a testament to thoughtful development while providing an unparalleled living experience. The island's journey reflects the Lowcountry's broader narrative, making Kiawah a place of natural beauty and significant historical interest.

Arts and Cultural Activities and Events

Kiawah Island boasts a carefully curated cultural programming calendar reflecting 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 diverse 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 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 places, 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.

Performing Arts Center

The Town's robust Arts and Cultural Events program has faced challenges due to lacking a dedicated, professional-grade venue. In August 2022, Town Council issued an RFP for a comprehensive feasibility study, completed by Webb Management and Theatre Consultants Collaborative in September 2023

The study revealed strong market potential and high demand for a performing arts facility. However, Town Council determined that a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization would be better positioned to develop and operate the center rather than establishing a municipal facility. This decision led to the creation of the Lowcountry Arts Center, an independent nonprofit organization currently in early development.

Civic and Cultural Center

The Town is exploring the possibility of adding a civic and cultural center to the existing municipal property. This potential facility would create dedicated space for cultural events, performing arts programs, and community gatherings while addressing current venue shortages and relieving space constraints in existing facilities.

The concept includes an acoustically engineered 250-300 seat auditorium/recital hall, flexible community meeting rooms, and open gathering areas. The proposed facility would be located on the municipal property with potential scenic views of grand oaks and estuarine marsh. Whether configured as an addition to

existing Town Hall or as a freestanding building, the facility could allow for shared infrastructure, operational efficiencies, and combined staffing. The Town is in the early stages of evaluating this concept, and no final decision has been made.

Recreational and Educational Activities

Kiawah has recreational and educational opportunities. Beaches, leisure trails, and maritime forests provide settings for outdoor activities

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

The Kiawah Island Golf Resort provides instruction and excursions for various skill levels. The resort's Nature Program offers guided experiences including kayaking excursions and birding walks that showcase the island's ecosystem. The Roy Barth Tennis Center offers facilities and coaching, ranking among top tennis resorts globally.

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

Premiere Golf Culture

Kiawah golf offerings represent the pinnacle of the sport, cementing Kiawah's reputation as a world-class golf destination. With five exceptional courses on the Island and two off-island.

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.

Members of the Kiawah Island Club have access to two additional world-class courses. Also, off island, 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 guests.

All Kiawah Island Golf Resort courses are

certified as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries, demonstrating Kiawah's dedication to environmental stewardship alongside golfing excellence.

Community Outreach

Kiawah's community culture embodies a deep commitment to philanthropic engagement and regional stewardship. This cultural value manifests through the active participation of residents and organizations in initiatives that create meaningful impact across the sea islands and broader Lowcountry region, reflecting the community's dedication to preserving and enriching the area's cultural fabric.

The Town's Charitable Contributions program stands as a cornerstone of these efforts. This initiative 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's "Kiawah Cares" initiative connects residents with non-profit organizations in the Johns and Wadmalaw Islands. This initiative facilitates meaningful community engagement and support for neighboring communities through volunteer opportunities, fundraising events, and educational programs.

Through these outreach efforts, Kiawah's demonstrates that true community leadership extends beyond geographical boundaries. By engaging thoughtfully with its neighbors, Kiawah enhances the quality of life for those in need and enriches its community, creating a legacy of responsible stewardship that benefits the entire region.

06





community facilitiesnext

Goal: Maintain and improve Kiawah’s 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.

Overview

Kiawah’s essential services are provided by multiple entities. Utilities are managed by Berkeley Electric Cooperative, Kiawah Island Utility on the island, Seabrook Island Utility serves Freshfields, Cassique, and agreements to service areas surrounding Freshfields, and various telecommunications companies. Emergency services are coordinated among St. Johns Fire Department, Charleston County EMS, 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 Town aims to improve service coordination, centralize communications, and enhance amenities and utilities.



Safety and Health Services

Emergency and Fire Services

Charleston County EMS provides emergency medical services throughout Charleston County, including Kiawah. Fire protection is provided by the St. Johns Fire District, which operates two stations on Kiawah Island. The Kiawah Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) serves as a Town volunteer group that assists emergency management during hurricane protocols, other emergency events, and special events as needed.

Municipal Public Safety Operations

The Town operates under a collaborative law enforcement model with the Charleston County Sheriff's Office. While the Town does not maintain its own police force, residents receive Sheriff services through County tax contributions. The Town Council enhances this baseline coverage through a supplemental partnership that provides additional deputy presence within municipal boundaries using off-duty, sworn personnel.

The Town maintains a public safety

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

department with a director and community service officers who provide both enforcement and non-enforcement public safety services. These officers conduct traffic ??, community safety education, and emergency preparedness activities while also serving as the Town's code enforcement officers.

The Town operates code enforcement through the community service officers to ensure community standards and municipal regulations are consistently upheld throughout Kiawah. The community services officers operates across multiple shifts to provide coverage to enforce the community's regulatory requirements. These officers serve as the primary enforcement presence, conducting regular patrols and responding to complaints during standard daytime business hours. They are responsible for monitoring compliance with municipal ordinances, addressing violations, and working with property owners to resolve issues in accordance with established procedures.

Recognizing the need for extended coverage beyond traditional business hours, the Town has established as contracted with Barrier Island Ocean Rescue (BIOR) to provide evening and weekend code enforcement services. This contract arrangement delivers dual-purpose functionality, as BIOR personnel conduct both beach safety operations and code enforcement activities along the beach while simultaneously supplementing the Town's code enforcement efforts during evening hours and weekends.

The Kiawah Island Community Association provides security services behind the main gate, while the Kiawah Island Golf Resort manages security for their properties.

Future Healthcare and Emergency Service Infrastructure

Several planned healthcare and emergency service developments will improve access and reduce travel time to essential services for Sea Islands communities. The Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Sea Islands Medical Pavilion is scheduled to open in late 2025, representing a significant healthcare infrastructure investment to serve Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island, Johns Island, and Wadmalaw Island. Additionally, Trident Health plans to construct a new medical facility on Johns Island, with construction expected to begin in early 2026, providing emergency care and other medical services to the region.

The St. Johns Fire Department plans a future station inside the Kiawah River development off Betsy Kerrison Parkway. These healthcare and emergency service facilities address the growing needs created by substantial residential development in recent years, as the geographic distance from existing facilities creates particular challenges for residents who currently face longer travel times to reach emergency and routine medical care.

Utility Service Providers

Utility services are provided by various private entities. The Town's goal is to ensure the highest quality of service, regardless of which entity is responsible for provision.

To achieve this, the Town will comprehensively review all utility providers to ensure they maintain high-quality service. This review should ensure appropriate investment to upgrade aging infrastructure and confirm that contingency plans are in place to provide uninterrupted services during storms and other emergencies.

Water and Wastewater Facilities

The Town is serviced by two utility providers: Kiawah Island Utility (KIU) and the Seabrook Island Utility Commission (SIUC). Each operates independently to serve their communities with essential water and wastewater services. Both utilities purchase water from St. Johns Water Company, which is sourced from Charleston Water System.

Kiawah Island Utility

KIU, a subsidiary of Nexus Water Group, provides water and wastewater services to Kiawah Island. The utility maintains and operates the island's water distribution system. KIU also manages the wastewater collection system and treatment facility that serves the island. This facility processes wastewater through an advanced treatment system before the treated effluent is used to irrigate the island's golf courses. In 2015, a new water supply line to the Island was installed to connect to the down island pump station on Governor's Drive. This creates redundancy.

Seabrook Island Utility Commission

The water and wastewater system, which is owned by the Town of Seabrook Island, provides water and wastewater services to portions of the town, including Freshfields Village.

Municipal Center Utilities

The Town's Municipal Center operates on a septic system with water service from St. Johns Water Company. Due to its proximity and KIU's service boundary limitations, the Municipal Center explored connecting to SIUC's sewer system, but this request was not approved. As a result, the Municipal Center continues to maintain its independent septic system for wastewater management. The Town will continue exploring sewer options with KIU or SIUC.

Solid Waste Management

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

Recycling is available to all single-family homes, homeowner associations, and 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

Berkeley Electric Cooperative (BEC) provides electrical service to Kiawah. Electrical lines are installed underground. Between 2008 and 2010, BEC completed improvements to these lines to minimize, though Kiawah continues to experience power outages during severe weather events or when underground lines sustain damage.

Communication

Telecommunications services on Kiawah are provided through multiple carriers and infrastructure systems. AT&T is the island's primary network provider, delivering cellular, cable, and internet services. Additional cellular

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

carriers include Verizon and T-Mobile, while internet service options have expanded to include Xfinity, Viasat, HughesNet, Always ON, Starlink, and T-Mobile Home Internet.

The island's cellular infrastructure consists of seven towers of varying heights, ranging from 65 to 173 feet, operated by different owners including Crown Castle, American Tower, Berkeley Electric, and Kiawah Island Golf Resort. Despite this infrastructure, portions of the island experience significant coverage challenges, particularly in areas east of Turtle Point. Coverage analysis reveals that the limited height of several towers, many under 100 feet, restricts their effectiveness in providing comprehensive cellular service. This is especially problematic for Verizon customers in the eastern portion of the island, where coverage notably diminishes due to the carrier's limited presence on towers beyond Turtle Point.

The Town is studying rewriting its cell tower ordinance to address these coverage gaps. Current regulations emphasize co-location and concealment requirements while limiting tower heights, creating challenges for carriers attempting to upgrade their equipment or expand coverage. Updates to the ordinance should carefully balance improved cellular coverage needs with maintaining the town's live with nature characteristics.

Areas for revisions include height restrictions and concealment requirements that would enable more effective cellular infrastructure while preserving the island's aesthetic values.

Central Communications Channel

The Town proposes a Central Communications Channel to coordinate all key island stakeholders, which is managed and operated by the Town'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 emergencies.
- Integration with existing emergency management systems at the county and state levels.

By centralizing communication under the Town's authority, Kiawah 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.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

Up to 300 electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) are registered on the Island. As the number of EVs on the roads of Kiawah continues to rise, the island (Town) should contribute to this green effort of island residents and visitors by implementing a standardized network of EV Charging stations. Many of the HOA regimes on the Island prohibit the installation of private charging stations.

Currently, the Town has installed three public EV charging stations located behind Town Hall.

Amenities

While limited due to its private, gated nature, public amenities on Kiawah play a crucial role in the community. As the Town embarks on long-range planning, it should evaluate opportunities to expand its role in providing public amenities despite current constraints. The beach represents the primary public amenity, managed by the Town to protect this vital natural resource.

Currently, the Town’s role in providing public amenities is constrained by its lack of landownership behind the gate. Beyond the Municipal Center, which serves administrative functions and provides limited meeting space, the Town has limited ability to provide traditional municipal amenities. Looking

ahead, the Town should consider strategic opportunities to acquire land or better utility the Municipal Center complex to enhance public offerings. This could include exploring partnerships with private entities for land acquisition, evaluating potential sites for new public facilities, or reimagining the current Municipal Center to incorporate additional community amenities. Such initiatives would need to carefully balance Kiawah’s private character with the growing need for public spaces that serve both residents and visitors.

This forward-thinking approach would require careful consideration of funding mechanisms, operational responsibilities, and integration with Kiawah’s established character, while ensuring any new public amenities meet the evolving needs of the community.

Beachwalker County Park operates under a 99-year lease agreement established in 1976 between Kiawah Partners and the Charleston County Government. Managed by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission, it provides an essential public access point to the beach.

The Kiawah Island Community Association provides property owners with access to a network of amenities across the island. These include the Sandcastle, three boat or kayak launch facilities, three observation towers, miles of leisure trails, and over 30 beach access boardwalks. The Housing Market Study found KICA’s amenities competitive with peer associations.

Kiawah Island Club operates two additional golf courses, The Beach Club, Sasanqua Spa, and several dining establishments available to Club members. This tiered amenity structure differs from some competitor communities like Palmetto Bluff, where all owners have

universal access to club amenities. For owners not part of the KI Club, amenity access through KICA, while competitive with peer associations, provides fewer options than communities with mandatory club membership.

Freshfields Village, owned by EDENS, is a village-style shopping center with multiple dining options and various services. Its central green space serves as a gathering area for community events.

Collectively, Kiawah features an array of private recreational facilities, including seven golf courses, over 15 restaurants, two luxury spas, multiple sports facilities, and numerous other amenities. This diverse range of high-quality offerings has established Kiawah as a premier resort and residential community, catering to varied interests and lifestyles while preserving Kiawah's natural beauty. The Housing Market Study emphasized that while these private entities are responsible for their facilities and reinvestment decisions, their continued success contributes to Kiawah's overall competitive position among peer communities.

As Kiawah evolves, the Town recognizes the need to take a more active role in providing public amenities through potential expansion of the Municipal Center and strategic land acquisition. This forward-looking approach would enhance the island's amenity offerings while maintaining the successful balance between public accessibility and private facilities, defining Kiawah's character.

Community Gathering Space

Kiawah Island currently faces a significant gap in its community infrastructure: the absence of truly public facilities and gathering spaces

outside the gate. While the island offers impressive amenities, they exist primarily behind gates with restricted access:

- Club members enjoy exclusive facilities
- KICA members (property owners) have access to dedicated amenities
- Resort guests utilize the Resort's public amenities

This access structure leaves the Town of Kiawah Island without dedicated public spaces that are freely accessible. The current arrangement creates several challenges for community cohesion and public engagement:

- Limited opportunities for inclusive community gatherings that bring together residents from different parts of the island
- Restricted access for visitors hoping to experience Kiawah's cultural offerings and community spirit
- Reduced public programming options for Town-sponsored events and cultural initiatives
- Fewer spaces for spontaneous community connection and relationship building among diverse island stakeholders

A dedicated Town community facility would address these needs by providing an accessible gathering space for residents, property owners, and visitors. Such a space could serve multiple functions: hosting community events, supporting cultural programming, facilitating educational activities, and acting as a welcoming hub for civic engagement and social interaction.

As Kiawah continues to evolve, establishing a public gathering space represents an important step toward creating a more inclusive, connected, and vibrant community beyond the gates. This facility would complement existing private amenities while filling a crucial gap in Kiawah's public infrastructure, helping build a more cohesive community identity encompassing all who live, visit, and invest in Kiawah Island's future.

07





housingnext

Maintain Kiawah’s excellent reputation as a vibrant coastal community.

Housing

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

Overview

Kiawah is a residential community with a world-class resort embedded within the community. Kiawah’s neighborhood contributes to Kiawah’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 Kiawah’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

Kiawah's housing stock caters to permanent and part-time residents and short-term renters. As of July 2024, Kiawah comprises 4,511 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 66% (2,972 units) of the total housing stock.
2. Multi-family properties, primarily cottages and villas, make up another portion of Kiawah's housing inventory, accounting for 26% (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 8% (366 units) of the total inventory.

this sector in Kiawah's residential and tourism economy.

Short-term rentals present both opportunities and challenges for Kiawah Island. While they support a robust tourism economy, they may also impact community dynamics and service needs. This pattern contributes to fluctuations in the island's population throughout the year, with peak occupancy during popular vacation periods.

Future housing policies will need to balance the needs of permanent residents, part-time homeowners, and the tourism industry. Given Kiawah's coastal location, future housing development must also consider environmental factors such as sea-level rise, storm surge, and coastal erosion. Sustainable and resilient housing designs will be crucial for the long-term viability of the Kiawah's housing stock.

Short-Term Rental Accommodations:

Short-term rentals constitute a portion of Kiawah's housing utilization, despite not being a separate category of physical housing. Kiawah's housing landscape is influenced by this trend, as evidenced by recent data. In April 2025, the Town reported 4,175 housing units on Kiawah Island. Of these, approximately 1,400 have been granted short-term rental business licenses. This translates to a notable 31% of the Kiawah's total housing stock having the capacity to serve as short-term rental accommodations, underscoring the impact of

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 April 2025.

Short-term rental information was provided by the Town of Kiawah Island, based on STR business license information as of June 2025.

Real Estate Market Overview

Kiawah real estate market in 2024 demonstrated continued strength, with 447 property closings generating \$1.07 billion in total sales volume. This represents the highest annual sales volume in Kiawah's documented real estate history and reflects sustained demand for properties across all market segments. The first quarter of 2025 recorded 62 property closings with \$146 million in sales volume, indicating continued market activity.

Property values remained stable across most segments in 2024. Single-family homes maintained a median price of \$2.99 million, essentially unchanged from the \$3.0 million median recorded in 2023. Homesite values decreased to a median of \$673,000 in 2024 from \$795,000 in 2023, representing a moderation from previous years' pricing levels.

The villa and cottage segment experienced substantial change in 2024, with median prices reaching \$1.45 million compared to \$710,000 in 2023. This increase is largely attributable to sales from The Cape development, which introduced higher-priced villa properties that shifted the overall market profile for this property type.

Transaction volume in 2024 of 447 closings represents an increase from the 340 and 386 closings recorded in 2023 and 2022, respectively. While below the peak activity of 733 transactions in 2021, the current transaction levels indicate sustained market activity and buyer interest. For historical context, the island recorded 656 transactions in 2020 with \$807 million in sales volume, demonstrating the market's evolution over the past five years.

The real estate market reflects consistently low inventory levels relative to transaction activity. At year-end 2024, available property listings represented approximately 2.6% of total island inventory, continuing a pattern of limited supply that has characterized the market in recent years. Historical data shows available inventory ranging from 1.3% to 3.1% of total island properties between 2020 and 2023.

The market data indicates sustained transaction activity across property types, with sales volumes maintaining high levels compared to historical averages. Property values have remained stable or increased across most segments, reflecting continued buyer interest in island properties. These trends have planning implications for infrastructure capacity, municipal services demand, and development pattern management.

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.

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 keeping these properties competitive and valuable.
- 2. Reinvestment Trends:** The study showed a positive trend in renovation activity, with renovation permits increasing significantly since 2010.

Residential renovations:

- 2019: 218
- 2020: 332
- 2021: 453
- 2022: 581
- 2023: 460
- 2024: 286

- 3. 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.
- 4. Construction Costs:** Kiawah's high construction costs (about 30% higher than the regional average) make redevelopment and reinvestment decisions more critical and potentially challenging.

To address these factors and encourage redevelopment, the Town should consider several initiatives:

- Considering options for the Town 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 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.

Workforce Housing

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

Census data reveals that nearly three-quarters of all workers on Kiawah 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.

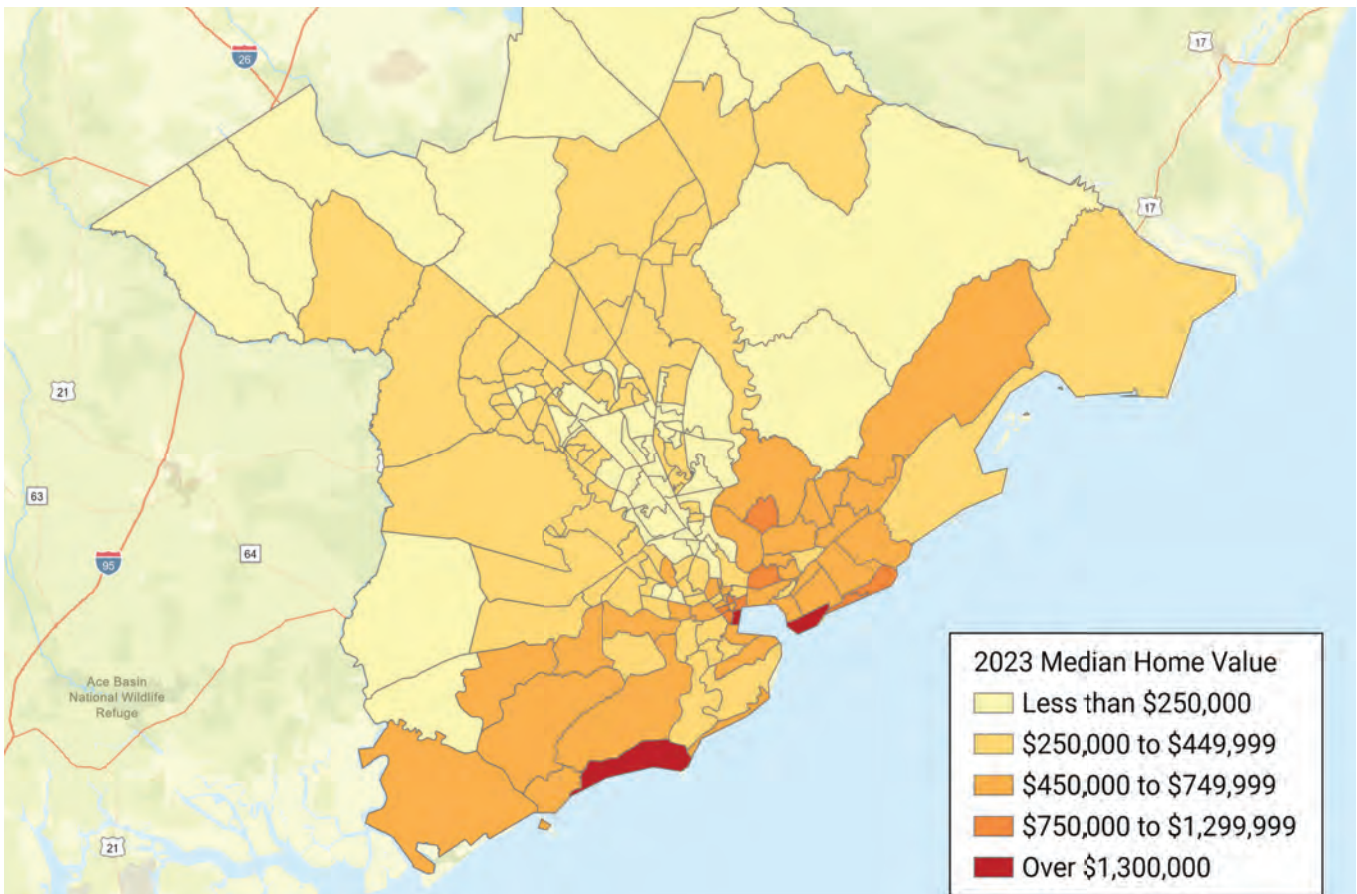
Data from the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics indicates that many of these commuters, especially those in entry-level Accommodation and Food Services and Retail

Trade jobs, earn 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 under \$250,000.

This housing affordability issue forces workers to look for homes in more remote areas of the Charleston region where median home values fit within their budgets. This situation affects workers’ quality of life because of lengthy commutes and has broader implications for the region’s transportation patterns and economy dynamics.

Median Home Values, Charleston MSA, 2023

Source: ESRI Business Analyst



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.

Overview

The Town guides land development through municipal zoning and future land use codes. As the island nears full buildout, 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 Kiawah's character while meeting evolving community needs, ensuring preserving the environment and maintaining the quality of life for residents.

Kiawah Island Buildout Snapshot*

The Kiawah Island buildout status provides an overview of the area's current residential

landscape and future development projections. Currently, there are 4,422 developed residential units, predominantly single-family homes. There are 341 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 potential number of developed residential units to 5,299. It should also be noted the potential for further development in specific areas based on remaining developable land and allowed density.

The following development analysis uses Charleston County parcel data and Town of Kiawah Permitting data as of April 7, 2025.

Current Residential Units

Single Family ²	3001
Multifamily	1174
Proposed Units* (<i>Projects under construction or site plan review</i>)	247
Developed Residential Units	4422

Undeveloped SFR Properties

Undeveloped Single Family Residential Lots	380
Less Vacant Conservation and Common Properties	-39

Single Family Residential Developable Properties 341

Future Residential Development (Projection)

Kiawah Island Golf Resort Residential	420
Kiawah Partners Residential	22
Freshfields Village Residential	94

Future Residential Units 536

Total Projected Developed Units 5299

Current Guest Rooms

The Santucary	255
Andell Inn	99
	354

Projected Addtional Hotel Rooms

East Beach	150
West Beach	150
	300

Total Future Hotel Rooms 654

*The following development analysis uses Charleston County parcel data and Town of Kiawah Permitting data as of April 7, 2025

Conservation Through Annexation

Annexation is a request by a private property owner, multiple owners, or a government entity to include their property within the service area and jurisdiction of the Town. The Town Council is tasked with approving all applications for proposed annexations assessing all relevant factors in determining what any annexation proposal is beneficial to the community. The policies and procedures for annexation are detailed in the Annexation Policy Plan and Procedures Manual.

The Town should consider annexing property principally for conservation purposes. Preserving the area’s natural landscape and maritime nature is paramount to maintaining Kiawah’s vision.

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.

Zoning and Land Use

The Planning Department uses zoning ordinances and land use regulations to manage the type of development occurring on the Island. These tools, when used together, are powerful drivers of new construction, redevelopment, and preservation.

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, Residential and Open Space	PR-OC
Active Recreation	PR
Open Space	KC
Conservation	KC

Planned Development (PD) can be incorporated into any zoning district, subject to criteria contained in the greater Town of Kiawah Island Zonig Ordinance.

Future Land Use Categories

Future land use guides the location and types of proposed development to align with the Town'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.

Active Recreation and Open Space:

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

Active Recreation, Residential and Open Space:

This category provides and is intended to promote the development of recreational facilities, including golf courses, with limited Residential in varied format, including single family detached/attached, duplexes and multifamily within a natural setting. Examples of this category are the integration of cottages adjacent to the Ocean Course Clubhouse.

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) that complement the community character. An example is Freshfields Retail Village, with a maximum floor area ratio of 0.2.

Civic and Institutional:

This category promotes community facilities and service buildings, both public and private, including churches, schools, utilities, and maintenance facilities. Examples include fire stations and Kiawah Island Utility company.

Urban Growth Boundary

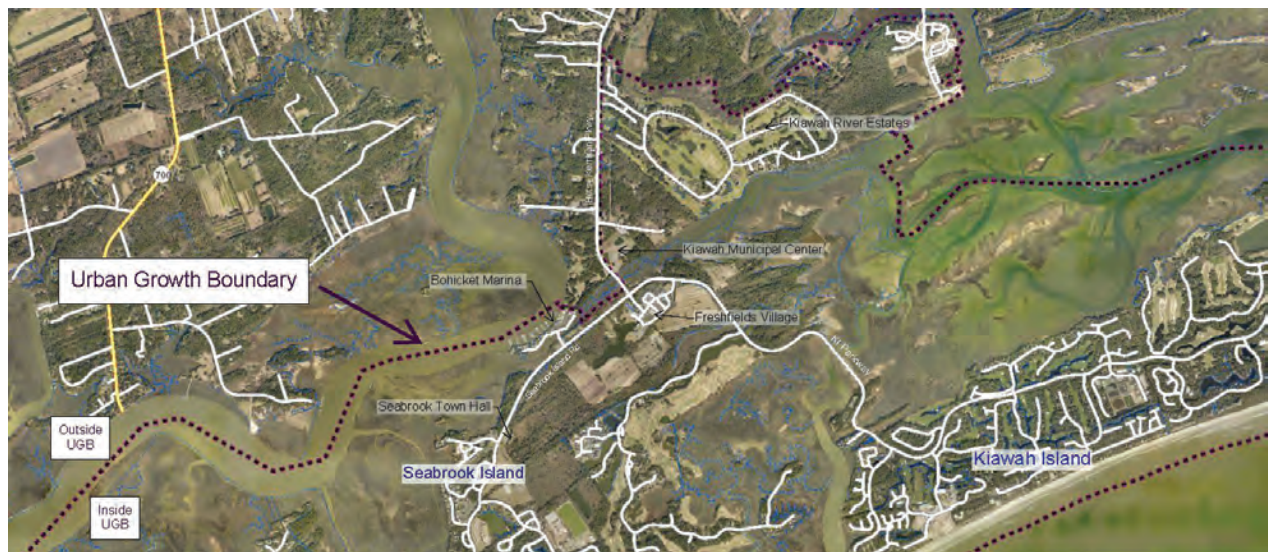
The Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) is a crucial planning tool implemented by Charleston County to manage development and preserve the area’s unique character, including Kiawah Island and its surroundings. Evolving from the Charleston County 1999 Comprehensive Plan’s Suburban/Rural Area Edge, the UGB was 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.

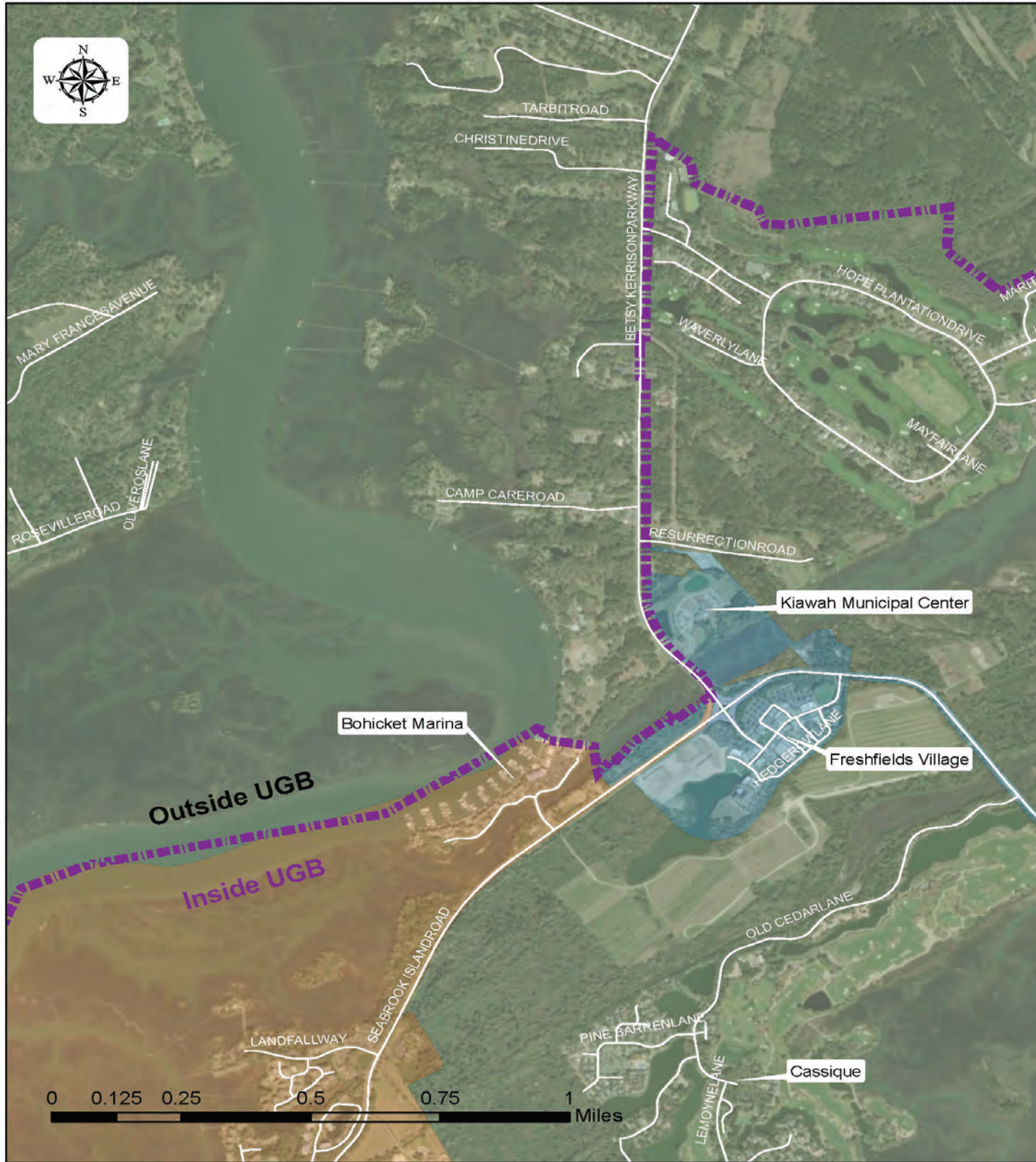
Looking to the future, it’s important to consider how sea-level rise might impact the areas surrounding the UGB, potentially necessitating reassessment to ensure its continued effectiveness. Education and public engagement are key components in maintaining the UGB’s integrity, with community outreach 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.

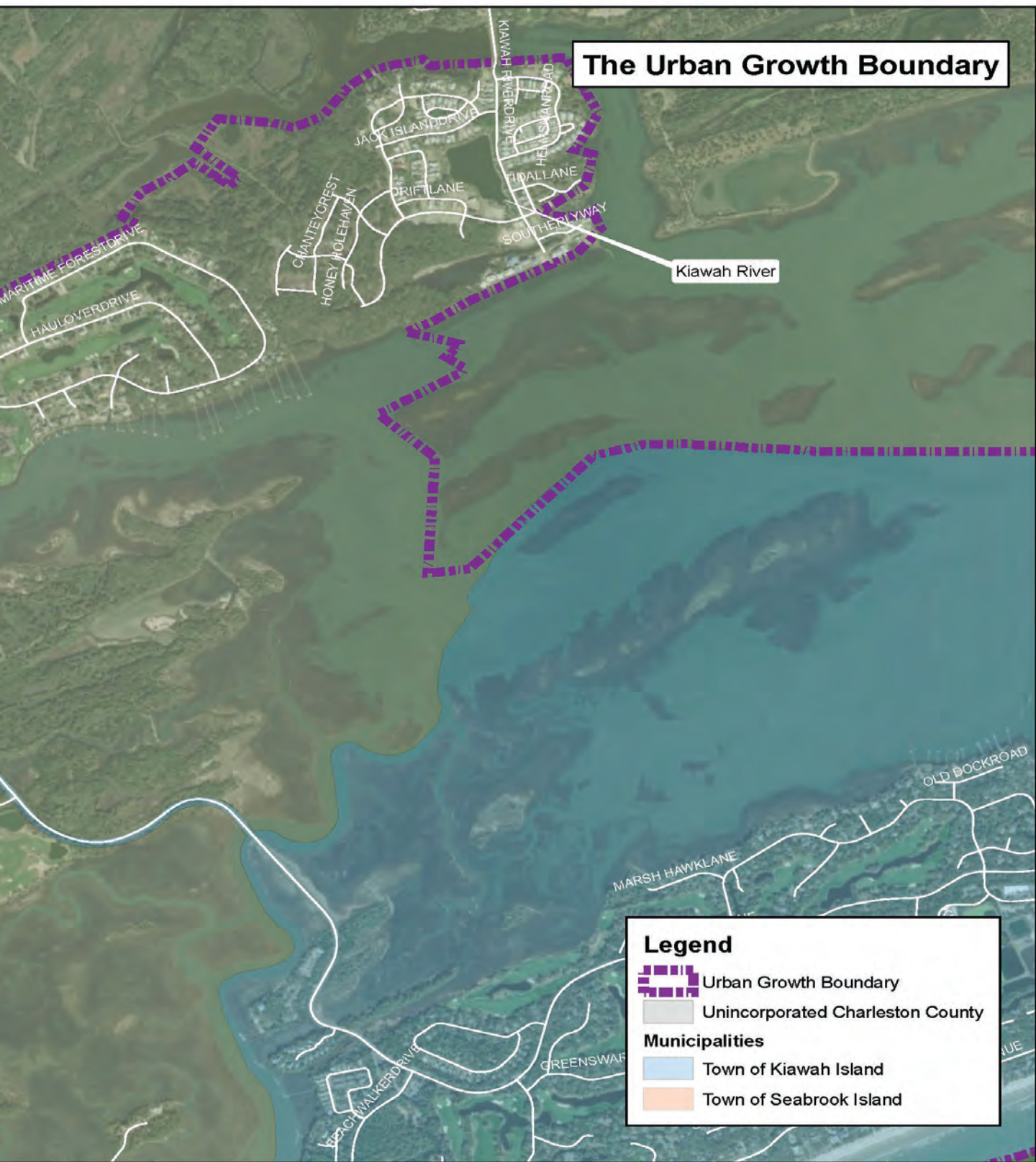


Source: Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department

LAND USE






Source: Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department

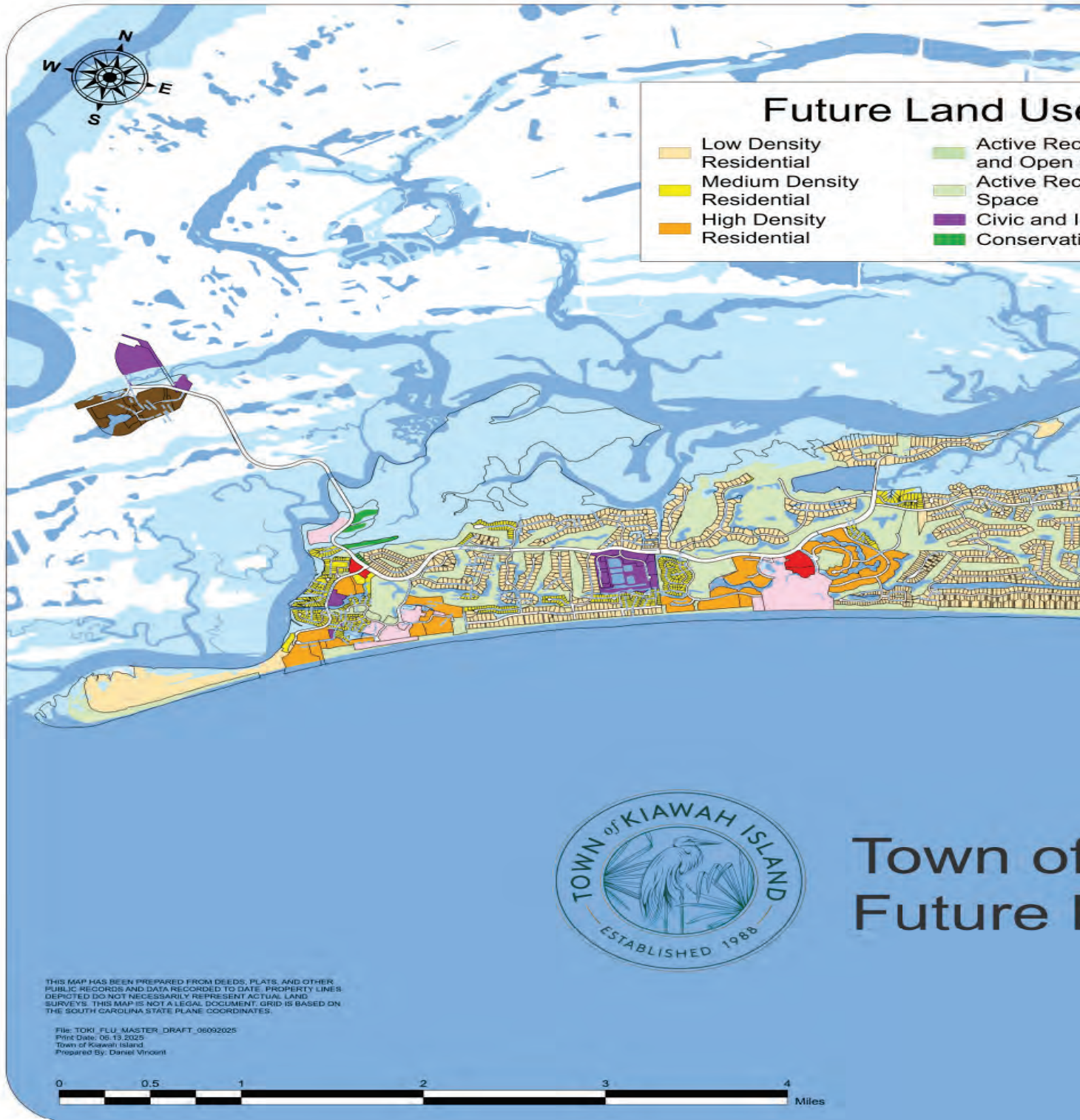


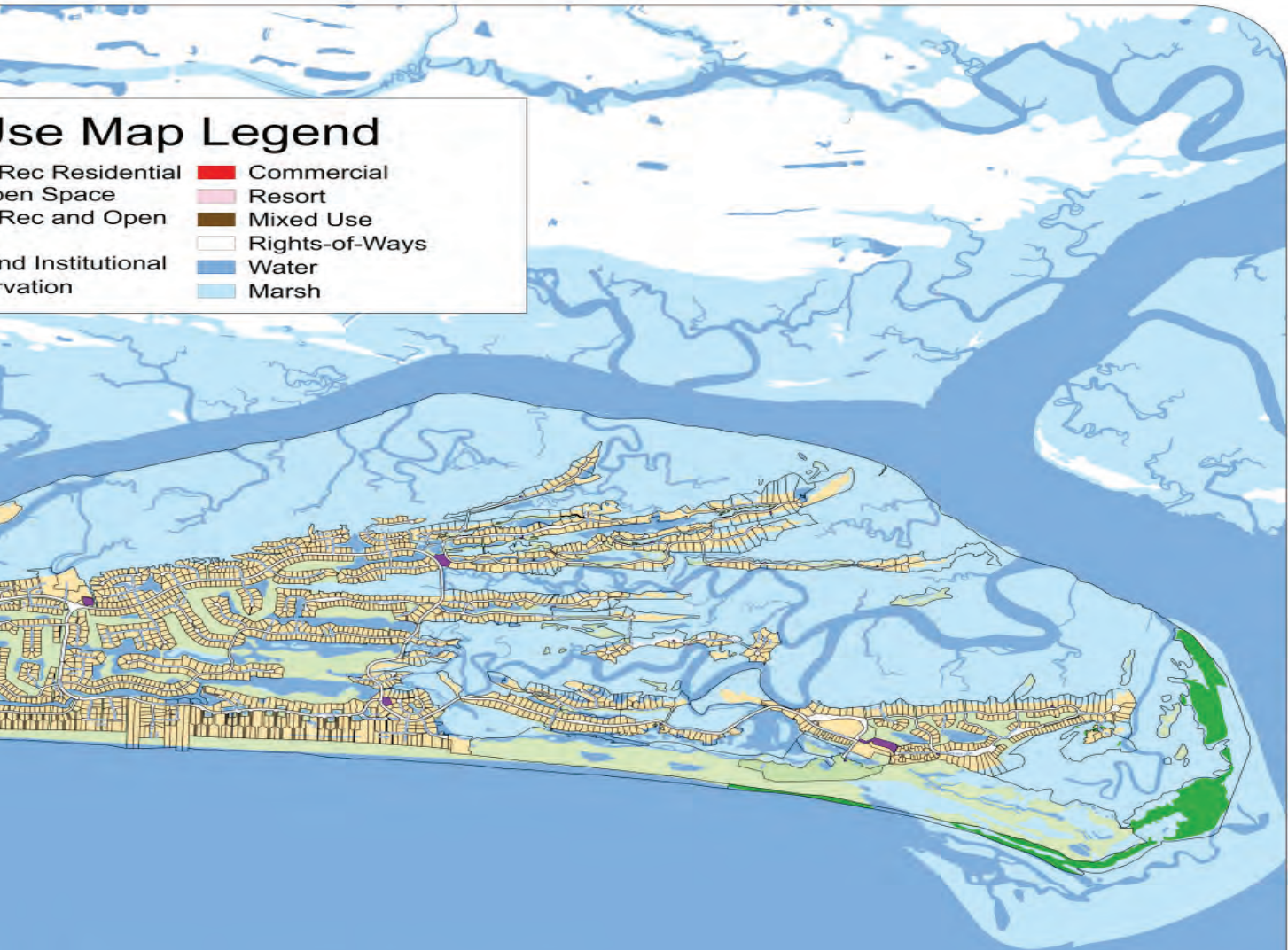
The Urban Growth Boundary

Kiawah River

Legend

-  Urban Growth Boundary
-  Unincorporated Charleston County
- Municipalities**
-  Town of Kiawah Island
-  Town of Seabrook Island





Future Land Use Map of Kiawah Island

Future Land Use Map

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.

09





transportationnext

Provide safe mobility options for Kiawah residents, workers and visitors.

Transportation

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

Overview

Kiawah's road layout contributes to traffic management challenges. Most roads are privately owned, primarily by KICA, while the Town maintains two public roads. Recent efforts by the Town have addressed some traffic concerns at the intersection of the main gate.

Regional connectivity is crucial, as almost all workers commute to Kiawah from outside the Town. 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.



Road Network

The Town is responsible for two roads outside the front security gate: Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive. The Parkway extends approximately 2 miles from Betsy Kerrison Parkway to the main gate. The Town also owns the roundabout that connects these parkways with Seabrook Island Parkway and the entrance to the Freshfields shopping center.

Additionally, the Town owns Beachwalker Drive, which is just under a mile long. It leads to the public beach access at Beachwalker County Park.

To address network challenges and maintain key access routes, the Town has made improvements to the Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive intersection, which is explained later in this section.

Kiawah Island has a unique road network structure. Most roads on the Island are privately owned, primarily by KICA, which owns and maintains approximately 60 miles of roads. 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.



Trails and Bikeways

The Town 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. Kiawah’s trail system is designed to provide beach access for both public and private users of the Kiawah areas.

The Town owns and maintains approximately three 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 Kiawah’s main entrance area. It is an important link to the Kiawah’s 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 spanning Kiawah.

The comprehensive trail network on Kiawah serves as a vital component of the

Kiawah’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. The trails also play a crucial role in environmental education and appreciation by providing access to the island’s diverse ecosystems. As Kiawah continues to develop, maintaining this trail system will remain a priority, ensuring that it continues to meet the community’s evolving needs while preserving Kiawah’s natural beauty and ecological integrity.

TRANSPORTATION





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.

Traffic Counting Locations, Town of Kiawah Island, 2022

Source: Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update



Traffic Evaluation and Management

In 2023, KICA and the Town 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 four years. In 2024, 2,365,567 vehicles passed through, representing a continued increase from 2,269,320 in 2023, which had already shown growth from 2,129,741 in 2022. This upward trajectory follows a notable decline from the peak of 2,431,383 vehicles recorded in 2021.

To alleviate congestion at the Beachwalker Drive intersection, the Town modified the traffic pattern, eliminated the outbound stop sign and, during peak hours, stationed a community service officer to facilitate traffic flow.

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 three times annually during peak season (June 1-14, July 8-22, and August 14-31).

Looking toward the future, the Town commissioned Kimley-Horn in August 2022, to complete the Kiawah Island Parkway Intersection and Corridor Study. This comprehensive analysis evaluates 13 key intersections along Kiawah Island Parkway, Betsy Kerrison Parkway, and Seabrook Island Road, projecting conditions through 2036.

Key improvement recommendations include:

1. Kiawah Island Parkway at Real Estate Office: Converting to right-in/right-out access with a connection from Beachwalker Drive.
2. Kiawah Island Parkway at Andell West

Development: Installing a traffic signal to better serve long-term conditions.

3. Kiawah Island Parkway at Freshfields Drive: Creating an interconnection with Andell West Development and converting to right-in/right-out access.

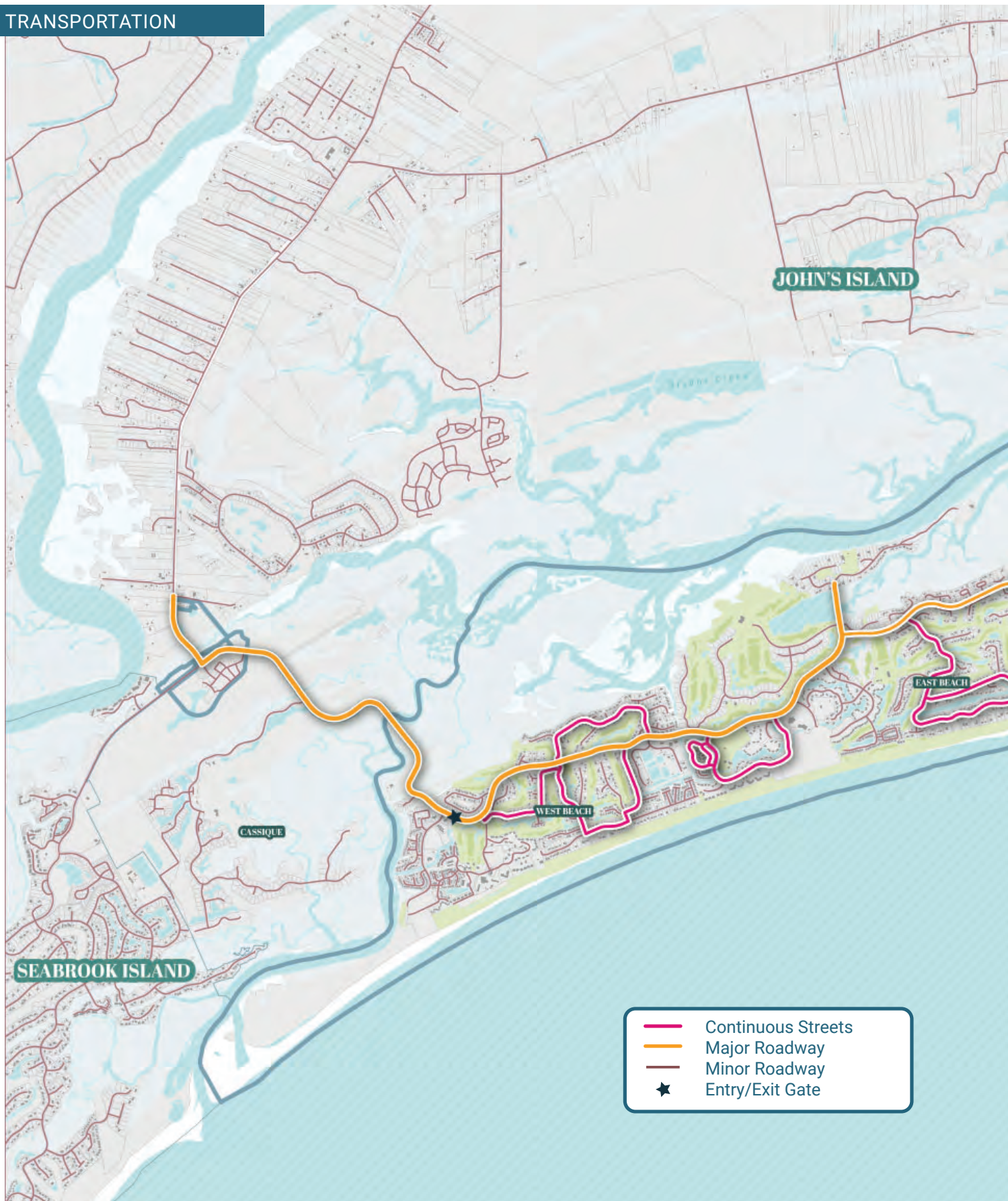
For long-term improvements, the study recommends:

1. Installing a turbo roundabout at Kiawah Island Parkway/Seabrook Island Road and Betsy Kerrison Parkway with a pedestrian bridge across Haulover Creek
2. Constructing turn lanes at Betsy Kerrison Parkway and Camp Care Road.
3. Considering a roundabout at Seabrook Island Road and Andell Bluff Boulevard.

These recommendations address current traffic needs while anticipating impacts from seven identified short-term developments and three potential long-term development sites, ensuring the Town's roadway network can accommodate future growth while maintaining acceptable service levels.

These comprehensive efforts underscore the Town's commitment to managing traffic flow, enhancing safety, and improving the overall transportation experience for Kiawah's residents and visitors.

TRANSPORTATION





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.

Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway Improvements

The Town has implemented improvements to Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway in recent years. On Beachwalker Drive, the Town completed several improvements in 2021, including adding a stacking/right turn lane into Beachwalker County Park and expanding portions of the bike path to 8 feet wide. In 2025, the Town completed improvements to the upper part of the bike path.

In response to the study's findings, the Town implemented strategic infrastructure 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. At the main 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 included adding a right turn lane, this improvement was not implemented due to complications with utility infrastructure and land acquisition requirements..

Kiawah Island Parkway and Kiawah Beach Drive Improvements

In December 2021, Kimley-Horn completed a study for 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

obstructed visibility, affecting drivers' ability to see pedestrians and cyclists. The study also projected traffic volumes in 2026, accounting for potential developments and an assumed annual traffic growth rate.

Based on the traffic study findings, Kimley-Horn explored various design alternatives to improve traffic flow and safety at this intersection, necessitating a roundabout.

Understanding the different ownership and jurisdictions of the roads is crucial when considering these improvements. Kiawah Island Parkway, 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 is owned and maintained by KICA. 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 Kiawah, serving as essential arteries for daily commutes. These routes serve workers and residents of all the Sea Islands (Kiawah, Seabrook, Johns, and Wadmalaw Islands). Contractors, sub-contractors, landscape and maintenance personnel, hospitality workers, and others rely on these routes. Census data reveals that nearly three-quarters of all workers on Kiawah travel more than 25 miles to reach their jobs, underscoring the need for safe, reliable routes extending well beyond the Town's jurisdiction.

These road networks are equally important for outbound travel, as Kiawah residents and visitors regularly journey to Charleston and other off-island destinations. The connection to area airports is particularly vital. Measured from the front gate on Kiawah, Charleston International Airport (CHS) is just over 30 miles away, while Charleston Executive Airport (JZI) is 14 miles away.

CHS has significantly expanded its services in recent years, with 13 carriers operating flights on 69 nonstop routes to various destinations across the country. This expansion has greatly enhanced connectivity for Kiawah residents and visitors.

JZI serves as a convenient alternative for private and corporate aviation needs. JZI plays a role for residents and visitors who prefer the flexibility and convenience of private air travel. The airport's proximity to Kiawah makes it an attractive option for those seeking quick and efficient access to Kiawah.

Multiple transportation options are available to reach Kiawah. 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 the Town 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's continued accessibility and prosperity.

Main Road and US 17 Improvements

The Main Road Corridor improvements project addresses growing traffic congestion in western West Ashley and Johns Island. This critical infrastructure initiative is intended to reduce congestion at the US 17 and Main Road intersection, increase vehicular capacity, improve safety throughout the corridor, and provide efficient access to local commercial and residential properties. The project also enhances bicycle and pedestrian facilities, improves stormwater drainage, and creates a safer route for emergency evacuations, addressing multiple community needs while supporting the area's continued growth.

Charleston County is currently focusing on Segment A of the Main Road Corridor project. This segment includes directional interchange flyover ramps from US 17 to Main Road, a spur bridge over US 17, extensive roadway widening, and a roundabout at Main and River Roads. Recent design modifications have improved access along US 17 while minimizing impacts on planned water infrastructure. The project is scheduled for



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

completion in September 2028. Construction began in 2025.

Impact on Kiawah

These improvements will benefit Kiawah residents, workers, and visitors. The enhanced main arteries leading to Kiawah will reduce travel times during peak traffic periods, improve safety along key access routes, provide more reliable access during daily commutes and emergencies, and support the growing number of residents and visitors traveling to and from Kiawah. The completion of Segment A will improve the experience of accessing Kiawah from the Charleston area.

Looking Forward

As the project progresses, Kiawah's stakeholders must stay informed and engaged. The Town will continue to monitor the construction timeline and communicate any significant impacts to residents. By remaining involved in regional transportation planning, Kiawah can ensure its interests are represented as the broader transportation network evolves.

Road Conditions and Land Use

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

1. Current Transportation Landscape

Kiawah's transportation infrastructure is characterized by limited access points, which presents unique challenges for traffic management. Kiawah is served by Kiawah Island Parkway, the main artery connecting the island to the mainland. Beachwalker Drive, branching off from the Parkway, provides sole access to Kiawah'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 Kiawah.

2. Traffic Flow Optimization

Addressing Kiawah'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. Additionally, developing a real-time traffic monitoring system for the Parkway would provide valuable data for

planners and residents, allowing for more informed decision-making.

3. Main Gate

The intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive is a critical juncture that often experiences heavy congestion. 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. Any redesign should consider not only vehicular traffic but also accommodate pedestrians' and cyclists' safety.

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, such as implementing a smart parking system, should be explored.

5. Alternative Transportation Promotion

An island-wide electric shuttle system could provide an eco-friendly alternative for getting around the island, reducing the number of car trips residents and visitors make. The Town or a private entity would own and operate this service.

6. Infrastructure Resilience

Identifying and protecting critical road infrastructure against environmental threats, such as flooding and erosion, is crucial for maintaining access to Kiawah.

7. Technology Integration for Traffic Management

Leveraging technology can greatly enhance traffic management efforts. Developing a Kiawah traffic app to provide real-time updates can help residents and visitors

plan their trips to avoid peak congestion. Technological solutions should be user-friendly and widely promoted to ensure maximum adoption and effectiveness.

8. Seasonal and KICA Traffic Management Strategies

Develop a comprehensive traffic management plan to address Kiawah’s significant seasonal variations and daily congestion. KICA should implement staggered check-ins for visitors and guests during peak times while also addressing delivery hours for rental related service providers (bike rental, property management, etc.). This includes managing Saturday short-term guest passes through the main gate. By adopting these flexible strategies, Kiawah can work towards improving traffic flow year-round, aiming better to accommodate both peak tourist seasons and off-season patterns.

9. Regional Coordination and Long-Term Planning

Traffic issues on Kiawah are not isolated and require coordination with neighboring areas. Working with Charleston County to improve road conditions leading to Kiawah can help manage traffic before it reaches the island. Coordinating with Seabrook Island on shared traffic management strategies can lead to more comprehensive solutions. Conduct regular traffic studies for long-term planning to inform future land use decisions.

10. Golf Cart Path Network Integration

Explore opportunities to utilize the extensive golf cart path network throughout Kiawah as an alternative transportation system during peak traffic periods or emergencies. This approach would create additional evacuation routes and reduce main road congestion while requiring minimal new infrastructure since the cart path network

already exists.

11. Kiawah Island Parkway Enhancement and Resiliency

Consider improvements to the Kiawah Island Parkway, the main artery leading to the front gate, focusing on 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 main 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. 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

Develop and implement a reverse lane operations plan for emergency evacuations on Kiawah Island Parkway. This would allow for more efficient outbound traffic flow during emergencies by temporarily converting inbound to outbound lanes. Regular drills and simulations should be conducted to ensure the effectiveness of this plan and familiarize residents with evacuation procedures.

10





priority investmentsnext

Invest in enhancing resiliency and critical 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.

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. Currently, it outlines the development of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to coordinate prioritization, planning, and budgeting for these priorities over ten years. The plan emphasizes 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.

A more detailed analysis is needed 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 such as road elevations, beach restoration, stormwater management improvements, and the potential installation of a town-owned cell tower to address poor cellular service on Kiawah.

Beyond infrastructure and resiliency, priority investments may emerge from future initiatives which the Town elects to pursue related to the recommendations contained in the KiawahNext Plan.

Capital Improvement Plan

The purpose of the Capital Improvement Plan 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.
- Identifies the most economical means of financing capital projects.
- Increase 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 updated by the Town Council during the annual budget process and will involve evaluating projected fund balances compared to the 10-year funding requirements for each priority. After adopting the 10-year plan, the Town should review its progress annually, adjust or modify it, and incorporate recommendations as deemed appropriate.

The Town will also seek to invest funds and match their maturity to 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 and Means Committee meetings.

Funding Opportunities

The Town maintains a capital improvement fund to manage and fund major capital projects, as outlined in the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024.

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 to 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 emergency unanticipated expenditures 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 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 Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government and Berkeley Electric Cooperative

Grant Management:

To maximize these funding opportunities, the Town should maintain 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 should 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 enables the Town to address its planned improvements and potential unforeseen challenges effectively.

Maintaining Resiliency

The Town prioritizes investing towards improvements that will ensure the resiliency of Kiawah. To ensure adequate measures

are taken, it is recommended that the Town conduct and publish an Infrastructure Assessment every 5 years. The report will cover strategies and investments related to maintaining the following areas:

Emergency Management:

As a coastal community on a barrier island, the Town acknowledges the critical importance of emergency management and infrastructure. The risk of severe hurricanes and tidal flooding, along with the Kiawah’s remote location, makes coastal flooding a concern for Kiawah and its residents’ population.

To prioritize funding for emergency management, the Town will conduct reasonable assessments of its owned infrastructure and identify the replacement costs. Next, the Town will estimate the clean-up or recovery expenses related to restoring Kiawah to its pre-emergency condition. Lastly, the costs for the resources needed to demonstrate readiness and responsiveness should be assessed. These estimates should serve as the foundation for a target budget for the emergency preparedness component of the Capital Improvement Plan.

Hazard Mitigation:

The Town 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.

PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

Integrated into the Town's Priority Investment Element, hazard mitigation planning is crucial for identifying, prioritizing, and protecting critical community assets and infrastructure. 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 Kiawah entities.

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

Natural Resources:

The most critical investment priority for Kiawah's beach is storm damage recovery capability. Major storms could cause damage that requires years for natural recovery. Quick restoration is essential as the beach contributes significantly to the economy of the Town. The Town should continue to budget provisionally for beach restoration to pre-storm conditions.

Local Accommodations Tax Fund reserves have been maintained for beach preservation. A \$3.6 million major restoration was completed in 2006. The Town spent \$115,000 monitoring the beach and wildlife impacts through 2014. Severe erosion was identified in 2014-2015 near the Ocean Course driving range. A \$530,000 project in 2015 moved 100,000 cubic yards of sand to create a new half-mile inlet.

The Town is continuing to monitor erosion/accretion rates and shoreline changes. The Town is collaborating with KIGR on another east end channel renourishment. The permitting process began in 2025, with a potential project start in 2027/2028. Coastal Science and Engineering conducts observations included in the State-mandated

Beach Management Plan. Future priorities should align with the existing Beach Management Plan.

The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan:

The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan (CMMP), launched by the Town Planning Department in April 2022, is the first document to focus solely on the marsh and consolidate various management tools. It is envisioned as a living document that will be revisited every five years to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

The plan outlines proposals for restoring and protecting the wetlands on Kiawah, 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.

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 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 aims to ensure its valuable marsh ecosystems' long-term health and resilience.

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 a baseline 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 Kiawah Island Utility (KIU) Company owns and operates the water and wastewater service to Kiawah, where the original water lines servicing the Island require regular maintenance and a new secondary water line was installed to improve services to the island. Additionally, the Seabrook Island Utility Commission (SIUC) provides services not only within Seabrook Island but also extends to Freshfields, Cassiques, and undeveloped lands surrounding Freshfields, with a need for SIUC to service the Municipal Center as well.

As a priority investment, the Town will seek to work with the KIU to identify funding sources when replacement of the current system is required. The objective is not to manage another entity's responsibility, but to recognize the potential risk of system damage since it is the island's sole water and sewer service supplier. Ideally, the system should be evaluated to ensure that it will be adequate and resilient enough 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 condition will be evaluated upon identification and systematically scheduled for maintenance based on their projected useful lives. Additionally, the Town

will evaluate and grade the conditions of its 3 miles of road in terms of quality to inform future maintenance needs. Kiawah Island Community Association owns and maintains more than 40 miles of underground pipe that provides drainage for the entire Island. Proactive maintenance or replacement will be conducted to ensure that these pipes are in working order and do not jeopardize the functionality of the overall stormwater network managed by the KICA.

The Municipal Center complex is the single largest facility owned by the Town. Completed in 2016, it includes approximately 18,600 SF of conditioned space housing around 30 employees and a 4-bay garage.

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.

Overview

Kiawah Island faces unique challenges as a coastal community, including sea-level rise, increased flooding, and shoreline erosion.

This section outlines confirmed actions and ongoing efforts addressing these challenges, including marsh management, stormwater systems, beach sustainability, public safety coordination, emergency operations, and evacuation planning. It details how environmental assets provide critical protection against weather events, describes the Town’s emergency preparedness systems, and outlines strategies for enhancing coordination between key stakeholders to ensure comprehensive resilience for current and future generations.

Resiliency

Kiawah Island is uniquely positioned as a coastal community facing significant environmental challenges, including climate change, sea-level rise, increased flooding, and shoreline erosion. The Town of Kiawah is dedicated to proactively addressing these challenges through thoughtful exploration and consideration of various resilience and sustainability strategies. This section outlines confirmed actions and ongoing efforts, including marsh management, stormwater management ordinances, water quality initiatives, community engagement, and potential future strategies informed by successful practices from other coastal communities.

Environmental and Coastal Resilience

The Town adopted a Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, which provides a structured approach to monitoring, protecting, engaging, and restoring the island's marsh ecosystems. As part of this plan, the Town conducts regular monitoring and management activities to assess marsh health and address concerns like bank erosion and vegetation changes.

Additionally, the Town may explore implementing nature-based solutions, such as living shoreline techniques utilized successfully in communities like Folly Beach and Boyd, which involve oyster castles, bagged shell reefs, and manufactured wire reefs. These examples illustrate methods to naturally stabilize shorelines, foster sediment accretion, and enhance

marsh regeneration and marine habitats.

Advanced Stormwater Management and Water Quality Protection

The Town has adopted a robust stormwater management ordinance aligned with Charleston County standards. This ordinance emphasizes reducing impervious surfaces, using pervious paving materials, vegetative buffers, and other green infrastructure methods inspired by Low Impact Development (LID) practices.

The Town currently employs a real-time flood monitoring system, which provides vital data for informed decision-making and improved flood preparedness. The Town also actively tests local water sources for contaminants, such as PFAS, to ensure public health and ecosystem integrity, further demonstrating the Town's commitment to proactive water quality management.

Marsh Management and Conservation

Marsh conservation and shoreline stability are priorities within the Town's Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan. The Town is actively managing its marsh ecosystems through regular monitoring programs and targeted restoration efforts, with goals to preserve marsh functions, such as sediment accretion and filtration of runoff. Additionally, the Town may consider strategies such as wattle fences and wood breakwaters—techniques successfully utilized in regional projects like Boyd and Folly Beach—as potential approaches to further enhance sediment retention and native vegetation growth.

Beach Sustainability and Shoreline Restoration

The Town prioritizes the preservation and sustainability of its beaches, which are essential for ecological health, recreation, and tourism. Recognizing successful regional practices, such as those implemented on Sullivan’s Island and Folly Beach, the Town should consider developing a comprehensive coastal resilience strategy that includes beach nourishment, dune restoration, and erosion control measures. Specific infrastructure projects, like vegetated dunes and controlled access pathways, will be implemented to minimize erosion, protect habitats, and improve the shoreline’s overall health. These projects will be complemented by ongoing monitoring and adaptive management strategies to ensure the continued effectiveness of beach resilience measures.

Community Engagement and Education

Community engagement remains a critical aspect of resiliency planning on Kiawah Island. The Town may establish outreach programs such as ambassador initiatives seen in other coastal resilience projects, such as the Boyd Living Shoreline. These initiatives have empowered residents to engage in resilience planning, increase environmental literacy, and support community stewardship efforts. Educational signage, community workshops, and structured outreach programs will further strengthen local understanding and involvement in resiliency initiatives.

The Town should also consider adding a section to its existing website to focus on useful information (podcasts, training material, contact lists, etc.) for resiliency related information. The Town may also conduct periodic community outreach and training sessions to increase awareness of emergency resources (CERT, evacuation routes, storm shelters, etc.). These sessions can be supplemented by brochures and other

media that can be used with our visitors.

Kiawah Go Green

The Town actively supports environmental sustainability through various “Go Green” initiatives, focusing on reducing environmental impacts and promoting sustainable practices. Current key efforts include installing additional electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at Town Hall and encouraging broader EV adoption across the island. Further exploration into renewable energy sources, pursuing partnerships to advance green energy use, and pursuing green tourism certification as a Green Tourist Destination will remain central to Kiawah’s sustainability goals.

Resiliency Committee and Long-term Implementation

The Town established the Resiliency Committee to advise the Town Council on resilience and sustainability issues and guide the implementation of recommended strategies from the Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, Sea Level Rise Report and other relevant plans.

The committee’s role includes monitoring resilience initiatives, promoting community education and awareness, identifying funding opportunities, and ensuring comprehensive coordination across different organizational entities.

Through these structured efforts, Kiawah Island will continuously adapt, effectively manage resilience initiatives, and sustain the island’s environmental health and community well-being for current and future generations.

Housing and Land Use

Educate existing and new property owners on resilient building practices. As Kiawah approaches full build out and older housing stock is redeveloped it will be important to

utilize low impact development to minimize environmental impact. Town zoning standards should be reviewed and updated to account for environmental changes and trends.

Infrastructure

Our existing community facilities (utilities, first responders, CERT and Town buildings) should be evaluated based on existing and projected population levels for Kiawah over the coming years. Road elevation and drainage should be reviewed to account for rising sea levels and increased nuisance flooding.

Emergency Operations

The Town uses an Emergency Preparedness Plan and updates it annually. The purpose of this plan is to keep residents and organizations on Kiawah Island informed of conditions that 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 debris removal contract that allows debris to be removed after a hurricane or weather event. 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. This allows the Town to communicate status updates, request resources, and distribute public information notices to the county, fire, law enforcement, medical personnel, and news media from a

remote location should an evacuation occur.

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

Public Safety Committee

The Town's Public Safety Committee, oversees and coordinates all aspects of public safety on the island. This committee fulfills the Town's state-mandated responsibilities regarding its citizens' health, safety, and welfare, as outlined in Title 5 of the South Carolina Code of Laws.

As the central coordinating body for public safety initiatives, the committee collaborates with key partners, including the St. Johns Fire District, Charleston County Emergency Medical Services, KICA security, KIGR Security, Town Code Enforcement, Barrier Island Ocean Rescue (Beach Patrol) and the Charleston County Sheriff's Office. These partnerships ensure comprehensive safety coverage across the island.

The Public Safety Committee should consider developing a unified Public Safety and Resilience Strategy in collaboration with island stakeholders and partners. This comprehensive strategy would assess the Town's exposure to potential risks, evaluate utility resilience under various scenarios, and determine the adequacy of existing first responder capabilities. The strategy would establish clear organizational roles during emergencies and implement regular testing protocols for emergency response systems.

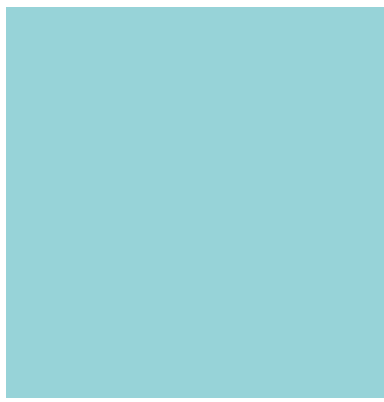
As coastal communities face increasing challenges from rising sea levels and severe weather events, the committee will continue enhancing emergency preparedness and

response capabilities. By studying best practices from similar coastal communities and maintaining proactive safety planning, the Town can build a more resilient community that effectively serves its residents, property owners, and visitors.

Flooding

Kiawah’s natural resources and ecology provide essential protection against weather events. The Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation for Kiawah Island identifies flooding risks and outlines mitigation strategies. The Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Subcommittee emphasizes the importance of maintaining a robust stormwater management system, noting that Kiawah’s interconnected ponds can manage rainfall from a 100-year flood but may face challenges with increasing flood frequency. Continuous evaluation and maintenance of this system, along with ensuring critical roadways remain passable for emergency services, are essential for long-term resilience. A recent Nor’easter in December 2023 underscored these vulnerabilities by causing severe flooding, affecting critical infrastructure and roads.





TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

kiawahnext

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025