

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Kiawah Island Municipal Center
January 7, 2026, 1:00 pm

Minutes

I. Call to Order: Ms. Hennessy called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

II. Roll Call:

Present: Joanne Hennessy, *Chair*
Larry Iwan, *Vice Chair*
John Connolly
Sandy Devine
Maribeth Schmersal
Rob Ryan

Also Present: John Taylor, Jr., *Planning Director*
Patrea St. John, *Planner 1*
Daniel Vincent, *Planner 1*

III. Approval of Minutes:

A. Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of December 5th, 2025

Mr. Iwan made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 5th 2025, Planning Commission meeting. Ms. Devine seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

IV. Public Comments: (Agenda Items Only) None

V. Old Business:

A. Stormwater Management – Phase II Update.

Mr. Taylor provided an update on stormwater management efforts, reporting that a meeting had taken place before the holidays with several planning commission members, staff, and the consultant team. He indicated they were still in the information-gathering stage, with the consultant team working on developing standards that are contextual to Kiawah Island.

Mr. Taylor mentioned that upcoming stakeholder sessions were scheduled for Thursday, where Lucas Hernandez - Weston & Sampson (consultant) would be meeting with the Kiawah Island Community Association to understand stormwater infrastructure. He emphasized the importance of working closely with the Community Association since they control and manage all the infrastructure, not the town. Additional meetings with other stakeholders including the resort and conservancy were also planned.

There was discussion about having a Planning Commission member attend the stakeholder meeting to ensure information flow, particularly as they would be developing regulations. A follow-up meeting with Town Council members Kaye and Spencer, representing the resiliency and infrastructure committees, was also mentioned.

B. Continuation of Enhanced Protections for Beachfront and Environmentally Sensitive Areas – Phase II Update.

Mr. Taylor reported that the proposed beachfront overlay zoning district was still being refined, with another workshop scheduled for the following week on January 16th. He anticipated that by February or March, the Planning Commission would be in a position to take action on the ordinance, either recommending it to Town Council or continuing to hear additional community input.

Ms. Schmersal added that they were ensuring all questions raised had been addressed and that they were better documenting their thought process, which she acknowledged had not been well done initially.

VI. New Business

A. Zoning Text Amendment Application(s): AZO25-0000015 | Combination of the Landscape & Tree Preservation Board and the Design Review Board

Mr. Taylor presented the proposed amendment to combine the Landscape & Tree Preservation Board and the Design Review Board. He explained that Town Council had approved the establishment of the Design Review Board at their December meeting, as well as the charter and application fees at the previous day's meeting. The current proposal would eliminate the Tree and Landscape Preservation Board from the zoning code and transfer its functions to the newly established Design Review Board.

Several minor edits to the ordinance were identified:

- Under section 12-24.2, replacing "landscape and tree preservation board" with "design review board" and removing a duplicate reference to "approval"
- Changing "TRB" to "DRB" in criteria (e)
- Changing "will" to "shall" in criteria (g)
- Removing "multifamily" from the purpose statement to broaden the scope to all residential properties

There was discussion about the "lapse of approval" provision, which sets an 18-month validity period. Mr. Taylor clarified that this refers to when a project must start after receiving approval, not the duration of construction.

The Commission also discussed enforcement of projects that start but then become inactive for extended periods, with Mr. Taylor explaining that those situations fall more under building permit enforcement rather than the DRB permitting process.

Ms. Devine made a motion to approve text amendment AZO25-0000015 with the recommended changes; Mr. Connelly seconded the motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

B. Discussion of Planning & Zoning Priorities for 2026

Mr. Taylor opened a discussion about planning priorities for 2026, noting they would be dovetailing with the recently approved comprehensive plan. He mentioned that the beach overlay, environmental protections for marshes, and stormwater standards were already on the docket, along with a comprehensive rewrite of the zoning ordinance.

Several priorities were suggested by commissioners:

- The Kiawah Island Alliance formation and implementation
- A tourism strategy and office to manage visitor inflows and balance competing objectives
- Appointing a Chief Resiliency Officer to coordinate all resiliency efforts
- Requiring infrastructure analysis before new projects (concurrency requirements)
- Taking a more active advocacy stance regarding development on Johns Island that impacts Kiawah
- Better coordination with external stakeholders, particularly Charleston County

Mr. Taylor noted that Charleston County was currently going through their Transportation Sales Tax (TST) exercise, and the town had submitted priorities including improvements to the River Road and Maybank Highway intersection. He mentioned that Joe Boykin, the Johns Island representative, had been voted as Charleston County Council chairman, which he viewed as a positive development for maintaining relationships.

The Captain Sam's Spit inlet relocation was discussed, with Mr. Taylor explaining that while Seabrook Island Community Association had submitted a permit application to the Army Corps of Engineers, any proposed project would also require approval from the Town of Kiawah Island since it falls within town limits due to the center line of the river establishing the boundary. This type of inlet relocation had been done previously, with the most recent occurrence in 2015.

Additional priorities mentioned included:

- Monitoring development progress on Kiawah Island
- Working with Charleston County on an overlay or engagement plan for Betsy Kerrison Parkway, with Mr. Taylor reporting that the transfer of a portion of the parkway to the town was moving through the proper channels at the state level.

Correspondence/Staff Comments

Development Project Updates

Mr. Taylor reported that the Night Heron Activities Building had received a temporary certificate of occupancy to begin testing equipment, with full operations expected soon. He also mentioned that the Ocean Pines project continues to advance.

Resiliency Committee Updates

No Resiliency Committee meeting was held in December. Mr. Taylor noted there were discussions between Council members Kaye and Spencer about ensuring the Infrastructure Committee and Resiliency Committee were coordinating their work and not duplicating efforts.

Mr. Taylor also provided updates on the communications tower project, reporting that site visits had been conducted at several locations with Crown Castle and service providers. He explained that some sites were more challenging due to space constraints compared to the Ocean Course location. There was discussion about the height limitations, with clarification that 120 feet (not 150 feet) had been approved for the tower.

The Planning Commission was also updated on ongoing coordination efforts with Charleston County and Seabrook Island regarding the Betsy Kerrison corridor, with staff meetings continuing.

Upcoming dates mentioned included:

- Mayor's State of the Town on January 22nd at 4 PM
- Town Council strategic planning meeting on January 27-28

Public Comments

Mr. Mark Permar asked for clarification about which property types would be subject to Design Review Board oversight. The discussion revealed some confusion about how single-family attached properties like duplexes, townhomes, and patio homes would be treated.

Mr. Taylor read from a memo that had been sent to design teams, which stated that properties with only two units would be considered single-family (exempt from DRB review), while those with three or more units would be classified as multi-family and subject to DRB review.

Several commissioners expressed concern about this distinction, questioning why a development with two attached units would be exempt while three attached units would require review. The Commission discussed the need to clarify the definitions and ensure the ordinance captured all developments that should be reviewed, particularly larger developments that might include a mix of housing types.

Commissioner Comments

Chair Hennessy thanked Mr. Iwan for his years of service on the Planning Commission, noting that while they sometimes disagreed, there had always been mutual respect and valuable input. Other commissioners joined in thanking Mr. Iwan and the planning staff for their work.

Several commissioners reiterated the importance of looking beyond Kiawah's boundaries at issues affecting Johns Island that impact the town. Mr Iwan expressed appreciation for the staff who had educated him during his tenure and for his fellow commissioners' commitment to Kiawah's livability. He also noted his disappointment that more community members did not attend meetings on issues that affect them.

The Commission discussed their meeting time, agreeing to generally schedule meetings for 1:00 PM going forward, with flexibility for occasional 2:00 PM meetings if needed.

Adjournment

Mr. Iwan made a motion to adjourn and seconded by Mr. Ryan. The motion passed unanimously at 2:00 pm.

Submitted by,

Patrea St John, Planner

Date: _____