



TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

kiawahnext

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ADOPTED XX.XX.2025

(DRAFT COPY)

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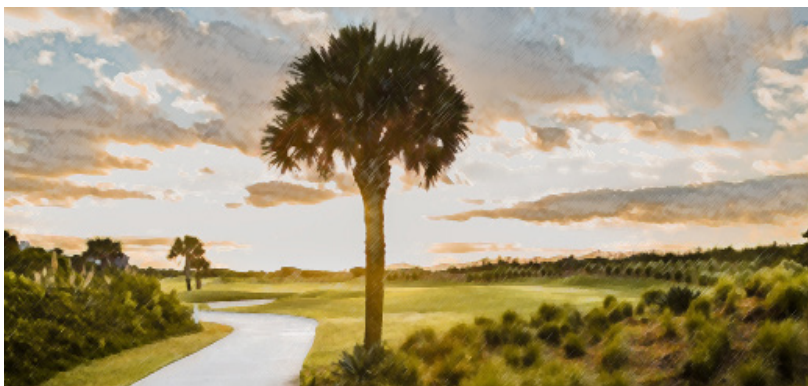
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Acknowledgements

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

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- Council Member E. Luke Farrell
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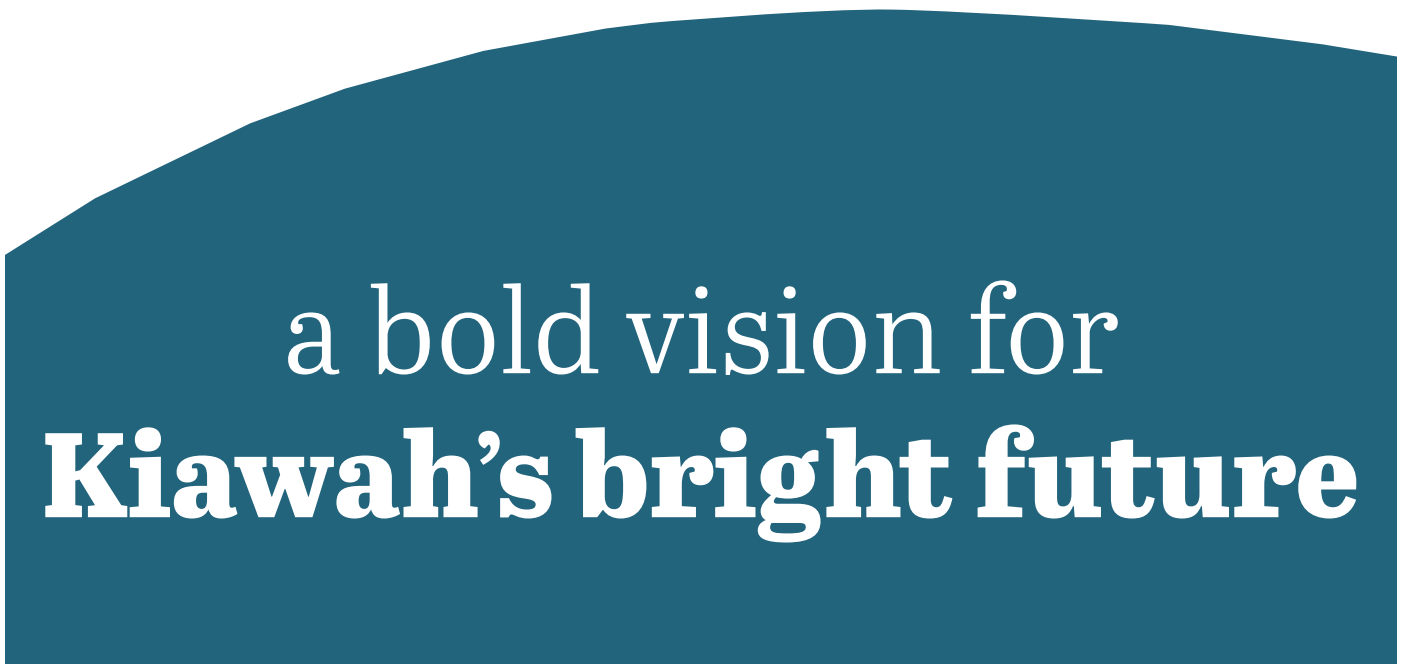
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a bold vision for

Kiawah's bright future



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Glossary of Terms

Kiawah Governance Entities and Major Stakeholders

Kiawah Island Alliance (KIA) - 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 Kiawah's future development.

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

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

Kiawah Partners (KP) - 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 Kiawah, this represents completion of all approved residential, commercial, and recreational development.

Choke Points - Traffic bottlenecks that constrain vehicle flow on Kiawah, specifically the Main Gate entrance and the roundabout connecting Kiawah Island Parkway, Seabrook Island Road, and Betsy Kerrison Parkway.

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.

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

Living with Nature - Kiawah'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 and severe weather events, while maintaining essential services and infrastructure functionality.

Executive Summary^{next}

KiawahNext is a comprehensive plan guiding the future of the Town of Kiawah Island (“Town”), 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 while prioritizing resilience throughout all aspects of implementation.

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 Factors Shape Kiawah’s Future:

1. Kiawah’s success depends on collaboration and advocacy among key stakeholders. Kiawah’s governance is characterized by a unique dual model consisting of the Town and KICA. Other stakeholders include KIGR and KP, EDENS, property owners, commercial interests and holders of conservation easements on and around Kiawah, including the Kiawah Conservancy and the Lowcountry Land Trust. The Town borders Johns Island, an unincorporated area in Charleston County. Growing development on Johns Island has increased pressure on roads and infrastructure, directly affecting the Kiawah community. Over the coming decade, growth within Kiawah and on Johns Island will require greater levels of collaboration and advocacy to ensure Kiawah’s interests are properly balanced between sometimes competing drivers and objectives.
2. Managing Growth. The next decade will be defined by the build-out of remaining residential and commercial development entitlements and plans, driving continued growth in a tourism-based economy. As Kiawah approaches residential build-out, the focus will shift 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.
3. Sustaining Kiawah’s commitment to Living with Nature is fundamental to the unique Kiawah experience. From its inception, Kiawah’s extraordinary natural environment has shaped the community’s identity and been preserved through careful planning and stewardship. Maintaining this connection to nature and enhancing environmental resiliency will be essential to preserving what makes Kiawah distinctive as both a residential community and visitor destination.

Four Strategic Pillars for Kiawah's Future

1. Managing Development and Growth addresses the strategic management of Kiawah's remaining development capacity as the community approaches primary build-out completion, with potential growth in residential units from approximately 4,100 currently to as many as 5,200 units over the next decade. While the full-time residential population is expected to grow modestly, expansion of multi-family properties is expected to drive increased growth rates in the visitor and non-resident population. This pillar emphasizes managing upcoming development, preparing for the shift from new development to redevelopment, and establishing structured mechanisms for greater collaboration among key stakeholders.
2. Community Experience focuses on maintaining an exceptional quality of life for residents and visitors by preserving natural resources, managing traffic, supporting sustainable tourism growth, and maintaining Kiawah's unique character.
3. Infrastructure focus on the need for physical systems to remain robust and forward-looking, addressing capacity constraints that have emerged as Kiawah has matured and grown to its current state while preparing for emergency circumstances and environmental challenges.
4. Resiliency prepares the community to adapt to environmental change, 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 additional 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, advocacy, and relationship management among Kiawah’s key stakeholders.
- 1.2. **Establish a Redevelopment Task Force** - Create a task force to analyze redevelopment trends across Kiawah properties, identify barriers to strategic redevelopment, and recommend incentives or mechanisms to facilitate redevelopment that align with Kiawah’s long-term vision.
- 1.3. **Enhance Kiawah advocacy** - Evaluate strategies to advocate more proactively at the county, state, and federal levels regarding 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** - To promote tourism that aligns with the Kiawah brand and experience, including a possible expanded focus on ecotourism.
- 2.3. **Expand public amenities** - Identify and evaluate opportunities for strategic investment in public amenities that provide maximum value to Kiawah residents and visitors.
- 2.4. **Maintain and prioritize support for protection of Kiawah’s wildlife** - Support efforts consistent with Living with Nature initiatives.

3. Infrastructure

- 3.1. **Stress test emergency transportation infrastructure** - Evaluate and periodically review Kiawah’s transportation infrastructure capacity under normal and emergency conditions, including the potential emergency use of leisure trails. This assessment will build upon the foundational work of KICA’s Adaptive Management Plan Task Force.
- 3.2. **Periodically evaluate the capacity, resilience and useful life of Kiawah’s critical utility infrastructure** - Review performance and recovery plans under normal and emergency situations.
- 3.3. **Evaluate strategies to adapt existing facilities to support growth** - Make

the best use of existing sites and resources.

4. Resiliency

- 4.1 Explore creation of a Chief Resilience Officer** - Establish a Town position to manage the municipal resiliency committee and coordinate the review and potential consolidation of resilience-related plans and initiatives across the community.
- 4.2 Implement a comprehensive community resilience education program** - Develop targeted outreach initiatives that engage residents, property owners, and visitors in understanding their roles in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices.

Kiawah by the Numbers

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, 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 Impacting 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 of overnight visitors driven by new development of 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)

The following development analysis uses Charleston County parcel data and Town of Kiawah Island Permitting data as of April 7, 2025. Population, Traffic, and Tourism trends source US Census, Charleston Visitors Bureau South Carolina Department of Transportation, and Kiawah Island Community Association data.

Dwelling Unit Trends Impacting on Kiawah Resources - Expected

Excluding new hotel capacity, a 20% increase from 2025 is likely, mostly driven by multifamily

Type	Key Drivers	Exp. Impact
Single Family: 3,342 units*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,001 current/under construction SFR units • 341 undeveloped lots (2025) • Expected shift to redevelopment 	
Multifamily Up to 1900 units**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,349 current/under construction units • ~400-500 potential new units^ 	
Hotel Up to 650 rooms**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 current rooms • ~ 150-300 potential new hotel rooms 	

Total potential residential dwelling units: 5,200 (+ ~20%)

* Includes existing and potential 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 within Kiawah and the surrounding Johns Island community will impact Kiawah resources

Commercial / Resort Development – Within Kiawah

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

Locations / Expected Use	Scale
KIGR: Undeveloped parcels zoned / entitled to be developed as hotels, residential and commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 200 – 400 residential units (Tradeoffs may occur between residential DUs and hotel rooms)
Seafields at FFV: Independent and Assisted Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 106 units (90 Independent; 16 Assisted)
MUSC: Freestanding Emergency Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~12,000 sqft
Freshfields Village: Five undeveloped parcels permitted for commercial or residential (Townhomes; freestanding units or units above retail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to ~80,000 commercial sqft Up to 96 DUs

Employment Snapshot

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

Employers	# of Employees
Kiawah Island Golf Resort	~1,700
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

Residential / Commercial Development – Beyond Kiawah

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

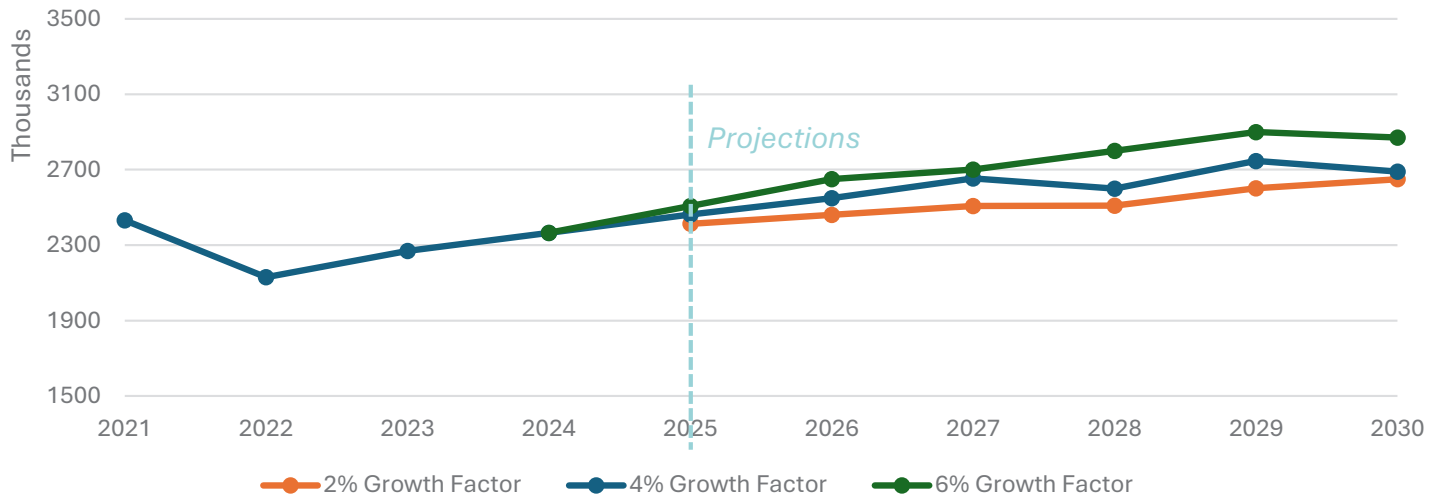
Locations / Expected Use	Scale
Planned Andell West (Harris Teeter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 160,000 sqft
Kiawah River: Residential and Dunlin Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 1,200 homes 72 guest rooms
Orange Hill Golf Course & Residential: Access to Kiawah Island Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 120 homes inclusive of up to 68 STRs
South Island Market: 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: Golf and residential expansion with access to Kiawah via Governors Club (KIGR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [TBD]

Tourism / Visitor Snapshot

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

Tourism Factors	Trends
Short Term Rentals	1,400 licenses (~1/3 of dwelling units) as of September 2025.
Non-resident stay visitors	~ 300,000 est. annual
Occupancy Rates (Vacation Rentals)	On average ~62%; consistent for past 3 years (booking pace and average rate for vacation rentals are increasing for the first six months of 2025).
Average Daily Rate (*outpacing inflation)	\$511 – ~28% increase from 2019 (\$366) to 2024
Beachwalker County Park	~122,000 annual visitors (2024) Peak (July – October)

Projected Annual Number of Vehicles Through Main Gate



“Since 2021, Kiawah has experienced approximately 4% year-on-year growth in vehicle traffic through the main gate. With 20% growth expected in new dwelling units, a higher growth rate in vehicle traffic can be expected. For this purpose, KiawahNext has modeled potential vehicle growth between 2% - 6%. Projections do not illustrate the extreme seasonality of traffic during peak seasons.”

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 ~2.7 – 3.2 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 impact 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 average per day on the KIP during June and July (2024); ~7,900 vehicles peak volume week excluding holidays; More than 10,000 through main gate during holiday peak periods. • 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. 	

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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 evolution. 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 residential community and visitor destination while preserving its unique natural environment.

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

1. Development and Growth focuses on strategically managing Kiawah's remaining development capacity as the community nears residential build-out, continued development in remaining commercial areas, and the need to redevelop aging properties and amenities.
2. Community Experience focuses on maintaining the quality of life that defines Kiawah for residents and visitors.
3. Infrastructure ensures that physical systems supporting community life remain robust and forward-looking, and capable of supporting both normal and emergency situations.
4. Resiliency prepares the community to adapt and thrive to environmental change 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. Development and Growth

Vision: The Town will take a strategic, balanced approach to future development, preserving Kiawah's unique character as a world-class residential and resort community. Core values—Living with Nature, economic sustainability, and climate resiliency—will guide all planning and development 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 and Commercial Sites:

Growth in new Residential Developments: Total residential units could reach 4,800-5,200, with the upper range depending on KIGR's residential versus hotel allocation (chart, page 98).

Redevelopment: 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.

Residential Character and Visitor Activity:

Kiawah’s housing patterns reveal a community primarily oriented toward seasonal residents and visitors rather than permanent occupancy. With only 29% of KICA members identifying Kiawah as their primary home and one-third of all residential units operating as short-term rentals, roughly two-thirds of Kiawah’s housing stock serves non-permanent residents.

While short-term rental licenses have remained relatively stable over the past five years, fluctuating between 1,312 and 1,400 units, the intensity of Kiawah use continues to grow. Vehicle traffic has increased 4.2% to 2.37 million vehicles annually, and member amenity usage has risen as property owners extend their stays on Kiawah.

These utilization patterns create unique planning challenges for Kiawah. Rather than experiencing traditional seasonal peaks followed by quiet periods, Kiawah now faces sustained year-round pressure on infrastructure and services. The combination of consistent short-term rental activity, secondary home usage, and extended member visits generates continuous demand that municipal services and public and private infrastructure must accommodate.

Tourism as a Key Driver of Kiawah’s Economy: Kiawah enjoys a vibrant economy, making significant contributions to state and county tax revenues. Overall, Kiawah supports an estimated 6,500 jobs, with the KIGR serving as Kiawah’s largest employer, employing over 1,700 people and ranking eighth 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.

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 growth in tourism and the visitor population while sustaining the unique character that draws residents and visitors to Kiawah.

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

With fewer undeveloped properties remaining, thoughtful planning and collaboration among Kiawah’s stakeholders is essential.

This requirement, combined with commitment to preserve and enhance Kiawah’s natural surroundings, will shape the needs, requirements, and evolving regulations for land use. The goal is to strategically utilize the remaining undeveloped areas for residential, recreational, civic, and commercial purposes 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 the context of the objective

to manage Kiawah’s residential density and population while preserving and maintaining the Kiawah experience.

Fiscal Strength and Stability: The Town currently enjoys a strong financial position, with **\$17.6 million in FY2026 revenues derived from tourism-related taxes, business licenses, permits, and local fees.**

Through sound fiscal management and balanced investment strategies, the Town has accumulated a significant reserve fund of \$46 million in FY2025, which will provide critical flexibility for investment in areas such as enhancing resiliency, emergency management, and public infrastructure.

The Town does not impose a property tax. Charleston County received \$96 million in FY2024 from real estate taxes paid by Kiawah property owners, which directly supports local fire services, law enforcement, schools, county parks, and county administrative functions.

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. KICA manages gate access, roads, ponds, common areas, and property owner amenities. KIGR and KP, as well as EDENS at Freshfields, and 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 in support of shared long-term goals.

Recommended Actions:

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

1.1. Establish the Kiawah Island Alliance:

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 Kiawah’s principal governance entities, as well as the major owners and developers, currently KIGR, KP, and EDENS. Over the next decade, investment plans and priorities among these entities 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, and promoting open dialogue and understanding among diverse Kiawah entities.

Priorities include working as a group to advocate for the needs of Kiawah and the broader community, especially as it relates to vehicular access to key services such as grocers,

medical care, and restaurants, with development that remains consistent with overriding principles of Living with Nature.

The composition of the KIA may include representatives from KICA, KP, KIGR, KIU, land conservancy groups, 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 the Town. This task force would develop a comprehensive plan to incentivize redevelopment while identifying existing ordinances and determining enablers or impediments that affect Kiawah’s long-term redevelopment goals. The task force should create a comprehensive redevelopment process and toolkit to streamline permitting procedures.

1.3. Establish a Kiawah Greenbelt

Fund Task Force: To protect and preserve Kiawah’s natural assets, green spaces, and the surrounding Kiawah River watershed—natural habitat for wildlife—while also mitigating traffic congestion through controlled development, a task force should be established to develop a comprehensive greenbelt funding strategy modeled after Charleston County’s Greenbelt Program.

The task force would conduct an inventory of existing green spaces, identify priority areas for conservation, assess current development pressures, and evaluate sustainable funding mechanisms tailored to Kiawah’s unique needs. It should create a comprehensive acquisition and management plan, establish partnerships with conservation organizations, and develop implementation strategies that balance environmental protection with responsible community development while ensuring long-term stewardship of Kiawah’s natural character.

1.4. Enhance Kiawah Advocacy:

This Comprehensive Plan identifies multiple issues and dependencies related to road and infrastructure improvements outside the direct authority of the Town. This situation underscores the need for the Town to consider strategies for more proactive coordination with county, state, and federal entities to advocate for needed investments supporting current and future growth within Johns Island and the Town.

2. Community Experience

Vision: Kiawah Island’s nature-forward development and world-class amenities have created a destination that attracts both permanent residents and visitors. With a single access road serving the growing community, maintaining the balance between Kiawah’s natural beauty and development is essential for the community’s future. This balance requires ongoing collaboration among residents, businesses, visitors, and local government throughout the next decade.

Understanding Our Community:

With **4,087** residential dwellings and 354 hotel rooms available today, and as many as additional **1,000-plus dwellings** and up to 300 hotel rooms could be built in the next decade, depending on final development decisions (see chart, page 98). Kiawah’s community consists of several overlapping categories:

Visitors: Kiawah receives an estimated 300,000 annual visitors, with peak activity from Memorial Day through Labor Day and during major holidays. Kiawah accommodates visitors through 350 hotel rooms and **1,351 short-term rental units as of August 31, 2025**. This visitor volume creates significant strain on Kiawah’s single access road and public facilities during peak periods. Accurate visitor tracking remains challenging because no single entity monitors comprehensive numbers across all stakeholders.

Residents:

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

Preserving Community Experience:

As Kiawah continues to grow, preserving its distinctive character and broad appeal is essential. This calls for a strategic focus on both the challenges and opportunities in key areas:

Traffic: With significant growth in the Charleston region, particularly strong residential development on Johns Island, traffic beyond the Kiawah traffic circle has become a more significant issue. Approximately 60 percent of respondents to the *KiawahNext* survey, cited traffic flow and congestion as either a weakness or a significant weakness.

Natural Resources: Much of Kiawah’s allure stems from its natural beauty, including ten miles of beach, maritime forest, ponds, tidal streams, and river frontage. Kiawah is home to shorebirds, eagles, bobcats, alligators, deer, combined with ocean and river life. The Town works to protect these resources through shoreline protection

measures and wildlife support programs. Appropriately maintaining and supporting existing programs will become increasingly important as the Town's population continues to grow and sea-level rise challenges the shoreline, flora, and fauna.

Dining and Shopping: Dining and shopping options represent an area for improvement. Quality dining and shopping options are important to both residents and visitors, yet approximately 40 percent of *KiawahNext* survey respondents cite this as a weakness or significant weakness. While KIGR operates numerous restaurants across the island, the broader dining landscape faces ongoing challenges. Freshfields Village has experienced some restaurant turnover since the 2023 survey, with new establishments replacing most closures. Kiawah restaurants face seasonal staffing difficulties that affect operations and sustainability.

Near-term dining and shopping capacity is expected to remain constrained. The Andell West retail center, anchored by a large grocery store has been delayed until at least 2029. While additional restaurants or retail establishments may be included in the initial phase, these components remain uncertain.

Amenities: KIGR, KP, and KICA provide many of the Kiawah's outdoor and active amenities, including golf, sport courts, access to docks, and pools. KIGR is redeveloping its sport courts 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. This issue is the lack of land available on Kiawah River for amenities.

Tourism Support: Kiawah Island Golf Resort and EDENS provide year-round programming through resort amenities and Freshfields Village events that serve both visitors and residents. Kiawah's tourism economy benefits from hosting premier events including the Ryder Cup and PGA Championships, with the 2031 PGA Championship scheduled to return. Maintaining sustainable tourism levels remains essential for long-term economic viability while preserving community character and infrastructure capacity.

Recommended Actions:

2.1. Implement traffic management strategies to enhance community experience: Staggered check-in and check-out scheduling systems to distribute traffic loads throughout the week rather than concentrated weekend peaks. This approach includes implementing dedicated check-in days or times for short-term rental properties and hotel guests while working with KIGR and property management companies to stagger arrival and departure windows. Additionally, create incentive programs for midweek arrivals and off-peak checkout times to reduce Saturday and Sunday traffic surges at the main gate and throughout Kiawah.

The Town and KICA should collaborate to address traffic choke points through targeted operational improvements at the main gate. Simultaneously, the Town should implement measures to reduce traffic buildup at the Kiawah and Seabrook

roundabout. Deploy real-time traffic monitoring technology to provide drivers with current conditions and recommended timing for accessing these critical areas.

2.2. Explore development of a tourism commission:

- This commission would focus on maximizing time and dollars spent on Kiawah while developing more formalized mechanisms among stakeholders to support options for visitors and residents in recreation, entertainment, arts, dining, and education.
- The commission should particularly explore opportunities to position Kiawah as a world-class ecotourism destination, leveraging Kiawah’s commitment to the Living with Nature philosophy while focusing on the rich and diverse wildlife population and miles of beach, marshes, river, ponds, and lagoons
- The commission would also address peak-period demands by developing access options that manage traffic flow more efficiently.

2.3. Public amenities strategy: Complete the civic and cultural center addition to Town Hall, and establish a framework for future public amenity development based on community needs assessments and growth patterns. This strategy should prioritize amenities that serve multiple

user groups while maintaining consistency with Living with Nature principles. The Town should develop a capital improvement schedule that phases new public facilities based on identified needs, environmental impact assessments, and available funding over the planning period.

2.4. Maintain support for wildlife in Living with Nature initiatives:

- Continue to support the Town’s efforts related to environmental stewardship and conservation.
- This support includes developing a comprehensive wildlife corridor plan that identifies, protects, and enhances habitat connectivity across Kiawah. This includes better understanding how end-stage development will impact the increasingly concentrated habitats and movement patterns of wildlife.
- The Town should incorporate native vegetation and buffers into land development regulations, identify and prioritize environmentally sensitive lands on and off Kiawah for conservation, and collaborate with stakeholders to protect wildlife and their habitats.

3. Community Infrastructure

Vision: The Town’s infrastructure and privately and publicly owned utilities are essential to the people who work, live, and visit Kiawah. This infrastructure must adapt to the evolving needs of the community

and recover quickly from unforeseen circumstances.

Context: Over the course of this Comprehensive Plan period, Kiawah will likely reach full buildout, accommodate more visitors, and experience additional commercial development while the environment continues to change. Each of these changes needs to be considered as the Town maintains and improves 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 Transportation Infrastructure

Assessment. The Town’s transportation infrastructure requires comprehensive evaluation under both normal and emergency conditions. Residents and visitors must have reliable road access to and from Kiawah at all times.

This assessment should prioritize the roadways’ capacity to handle stormwater and drainage challenges, ensuring safe passage during major storms. The evaluation should build upon the foundational work of KICA’s Adaptive Management Plan Task Force by expanding efforts to identify flood-prone areas and other environmental vulnerabilities that could compromise transportation access.

As part of this assessment, Kiawah stakeholders should evaluate

alternative uses of leisure trails to provide emergency transportation options. Expansion of the leisure trail system to allow connectivity with Betsy Kerrison Parkway will enable individuals to access other parts of Johns Island, including commercial establishments such as the farmstand and hardware store. This connectivity could help relieve vehicular traffic congestion.

3.2. Utility Infrastructure Assessment.

Evaluate the capacity, resilience, and lifespan of all utility systems serving Kiawah by reviewing their storm performance and working with providers to encourage comprehensive stress testing. This assessment should include requesting that Berkeley Electric share shutdown and restoration plans with residents while developing coordinated drought response strategies with Kiawah Island Utility and Seabrook Island Utility to address evolving water security challenges.

3.3. Facility Adaptation and Optimization.

As Kiawah approaches full build-out with limited opportunities for new property acquisition, the Town must creatively adapt existing facilities to support population growth and emerging technologies. This approach requires maximizing current space through alternative uses and strategic partnerships. These adaptive approaches will ensure continued community accessibility and safety despite existing physical constraints.

4. Resiliency

Vision: Fostering Kiawah’s ongoing 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 while protecting Kiawah’s essential service and infrastructure.

Context: Kiawah has faced environmental challenges in the past, and these issues are likely to become more pronounced during the next decade. Kiawah’s future resilience plans should consider several critical factors to prepare for these potential future changes.

Kiawah Initiatives: Kiawah’s Living with Nature approach addresses nature-based environmental initiatives through existing actions and ongoing efforts in coastal and marsh resilience as well as stormwater management, flooding mitigation, and water quality improvement.

Sea level rise: Sea-level rise represents a significant long-term challenge. Based on data available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, sea levels in the Charleston area have risen ten inches since 1950. The rate has accelerated over the past decade, with projections showing continued increases of approximately one inch every two years.

Nuisance flooding: Nuisance flooding presents another ongoing concern. Severe storms have caused nuisance flooding across Kiawah, restricting community access while affecting utilities and critical infrastructure.

Kiawah and Coastal Engagement: Kiawah

maintains existing partnerships and alliances with surrounding jurisdictions to monitor and address issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Through these collaborative relationships, the Town has monitored and implemented successful strategies that other coastal communities have subsequently adopted.

Recommended Actions:

4.1. Explore creating a Chief Resiliency Officer position to coordinate all resilience-related committees, departments, and efforts under centralized leadership.

4.2. Task the Resiliency Committee with determining the need for a consolidated Resiliency Plan. The Resiliency Committee should assess the need for a consolidated Resilience Plan for the Town that addresses all aspects of resilience, including development, housing, infrastructure, and emergency management. This plan should incorporate current versions of existing plans such as the Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan, and Stormwater Management Plan.

This comprehensive plan will address how the Town can monitor changing environmental conditions to determine the need for new initiatives, create frameworks for collaboration with stakeholders on projects and programs that mitigate damage from severe rain events, establish resilience efforts as a dedicated budget line item, and explore funding opportunities at all governmental

levels to implement resilience initiatives.

These collaborative efforts include implementing rain gardens, rain barrels, living shorelines, and pervious surfaces to address stormwater management challenges.

4.3. Develop an ongoing, comprehensive, and collaborative community awareness program that involves key community stakeholders, including the Town, KICA, KIGR, KIC, Charleston County, and the Kiawah Conservancy.

This program should utilize a wide range of media to reach diverse audiences through streamed content, social media, printed materials, and podcasts while considering the establishment of an Ecotourism Plan to promote Kiawah’s healthy and extensive natural ecosystem and rich wildlife population.

The program should include resilience questions in Town surveys to identify awareness gaps and focus areas, identify additional areas where the community can concentrate on resilience issues, and monitor the effectiveness of education and awareness programs while adapting as necessary to increase impact.

4.4. Integrate cultural resource resilience: Incorporate historic preservation into resilience planning through identifying and protecting culturally significant sites that may be vulnerable to environmental changes.

01 vision

02 process

03 comprehensive plan elements

kiawahneact

part III: elements

The Town adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1994. South Carolina Code § 6-29-510 requires Planning Commissions to review comprehensive plans at least every five years to determine whether changes in development patterns, community needs, or other factors necessitate plan updates or amendments.

The Town most recently updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2020. This document incorporates all required planning elements and fully complies with South Carolina Code § 6-29-510 through the following components:

Governance Structure: This element addresses municipal governance structure and processes. While not required by state law, the Town has included this element due to Kiawah’s unique dual governance model with KICA

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

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

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.

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

Community Facilities: Considers water supply, treatment, and distribution; sewage systems 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: Considers location, types, age, and condition of housing; owner and renter occupancy; and affordability of housing.

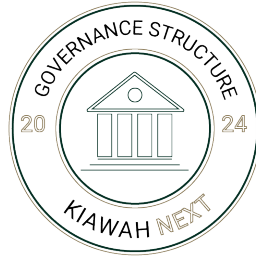
Land Use: Considers existing and future land use by categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, mining, public and quasi-public, recreation, parks, open space, and vacant or undeveloped areas.

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

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.

KiawahNext adapts the required elements to Kiawah's



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.



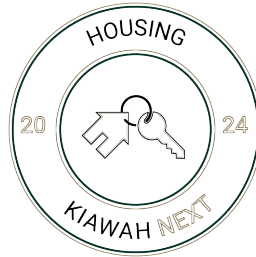
Preserve Kiawah's greatest natural assets and habitat.



Amplify and celebrate Kiawah's unique cultures, customs and heritage.



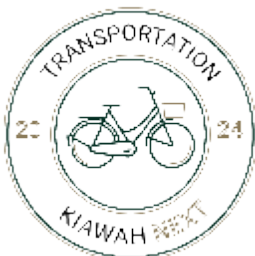
Maintain and improve Kiawah's world-class amenities, utilities, and services.



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 was developed through extensive community engagement. The planning process included input from homeowners, seasonal residents, workers, business owners, and visitors, all of whom have an interest in Kiawah's continued success and prosperity.

Overview

The development of the *KiawahNext* Comprehensive Plan was a two-and-a-half-year collaborative effort that began in early 2023. As documented in the acknowledgments, this planning process was managed by Town staff, steered by the Planning Commission and former Planning Commissioners, and guided by input from Kiawah residents and stakeholders.

KiawahNext replaces the Town's 2015 Comprehensive Plan and its 2019 amendments. This plan synthesizes recent studies, research, and recommendations from various planning documents to create a unified strategic framework for municipal decision-making through 2035.

Recognizing Kiawah's diverse community composition, the Town conducted both in-person and digital engagement activities to gather input from homeowners, seasonal residents, workers, business owners, and visitors. This multi-channel approach was essential given that approximately 71 percent of property owners live elsewhere as their primary residence, creating the need for flexible engagement opportunities that could reach both year-round and seasonal populations.

Project Inputs

The engagement process was designed to reach Kiawah's dispersed population and capture viewpoints from all community segments. The *KiawahNext* website served as the central information hub throughout the planning process, hosting surveys, project updates, and background materials for public review.

The digital survey became the most far-reaching engagement tool, with the project website attracting 2,832 unique visitors and generating 847 individual survey responses totaling 10,511 question responses. This represented one of the most comprehensive community input processes in the Town's planning history, capturing perspectives from the full spectrum of Kiawah's population including full-time residents, part-time property owners, seasonal visitors, and the local workforce.

The input gathered through these multiple channels informed the development of the four strategic priorities and implementation recommendations that form the foundation of the *KiawahNext* Plan.

Community Response

From February through July 2023, the KiawahNext planning team conducted community engagement activities through both in-person and digital formats. This section documents responses to digital and in-person surveys and presents examples of community input regarding goals and aspirations for Kiawah's future.

The project website attracted more than 2,800 unique visitors, with 847 individuals completing the comprehensive 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 subsequent pages present survey results.

#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

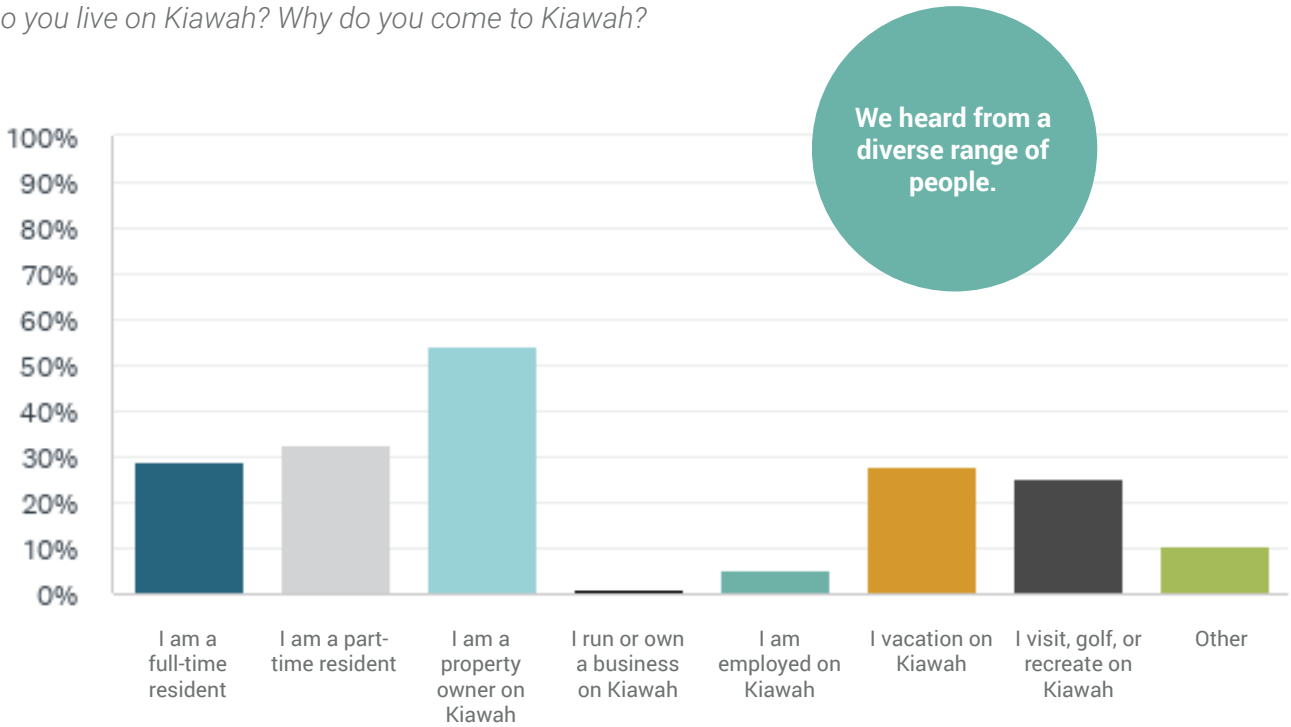
#10,511

Survey Question Responses

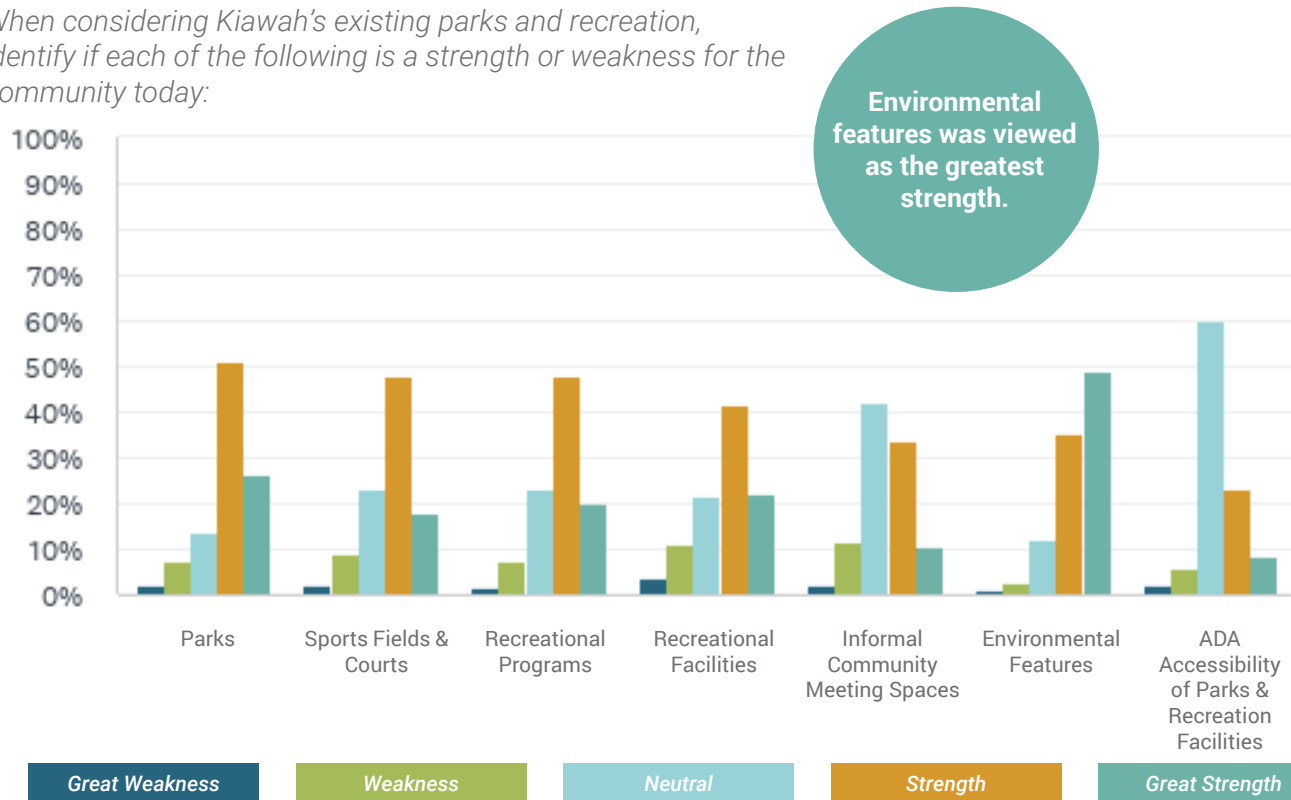
Welcome page to kiawahnext.com for on-line information, surveys, and plan updates.



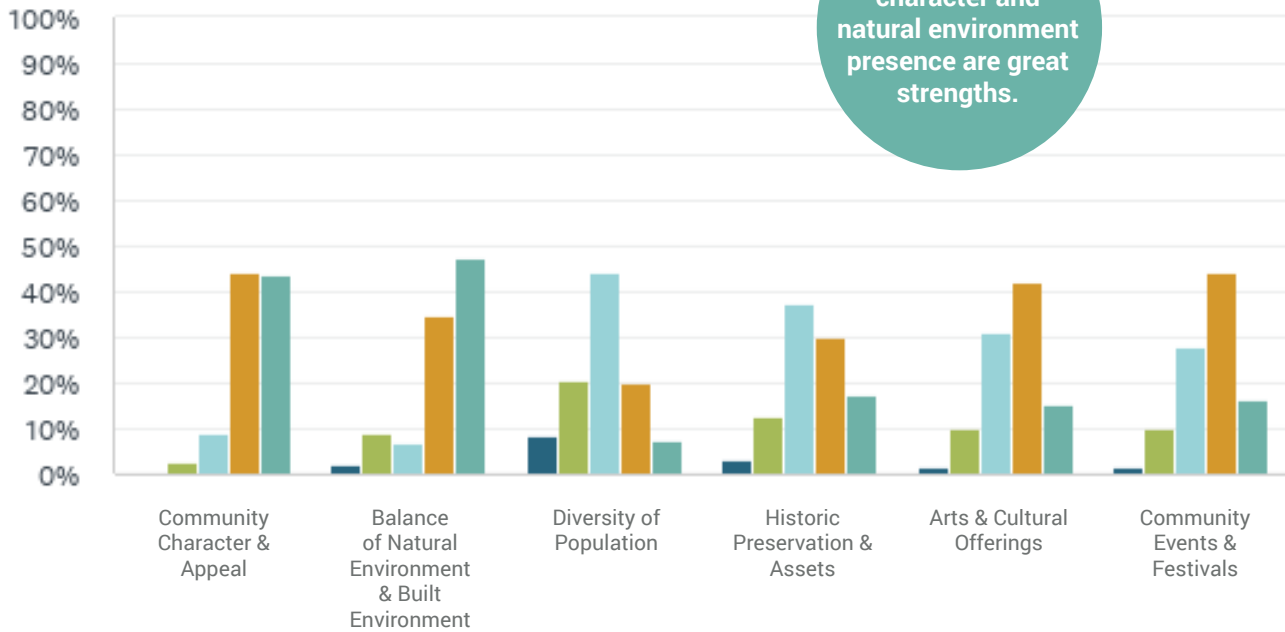
Do you live on Kiawah? Why do you come to Kiawah?



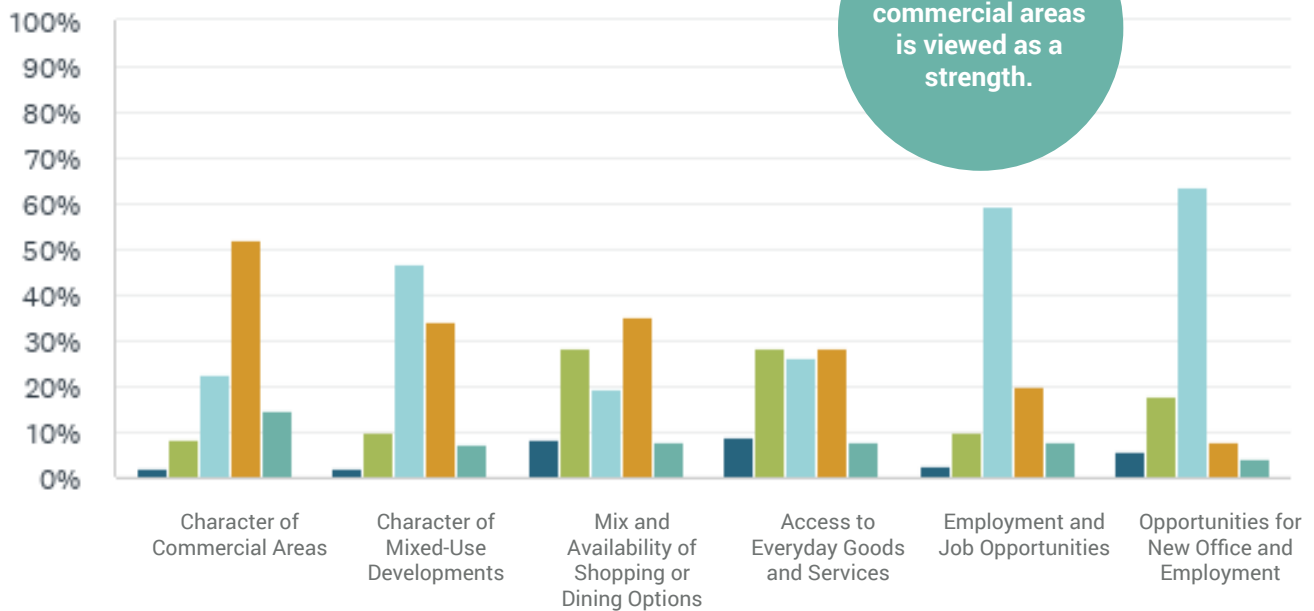
When considering Kiawah's existing parks and recreation, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



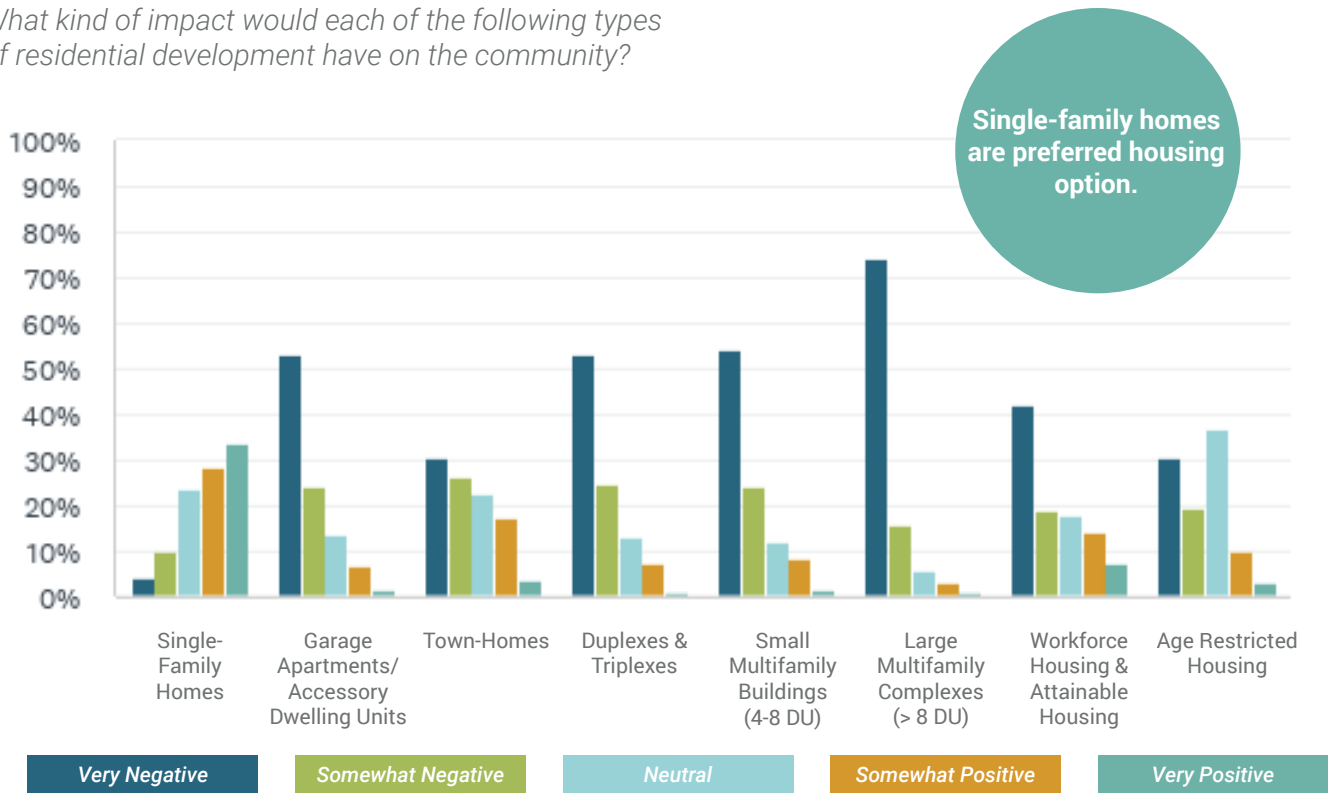
When considering Kiawah's culture and identity, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



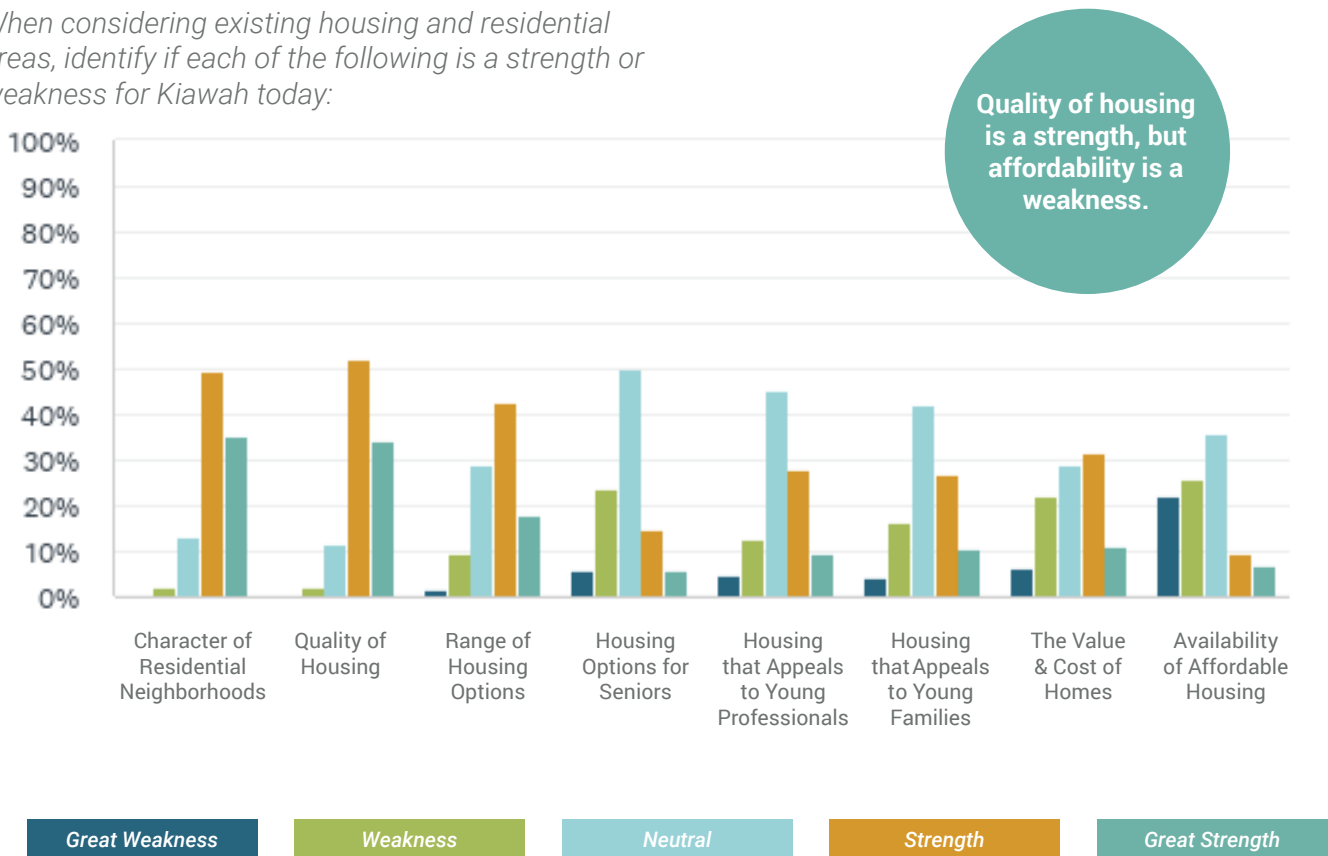
When considering Kiawah's existing commercial areas, identify if each is a strength or weakness for the community today:



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

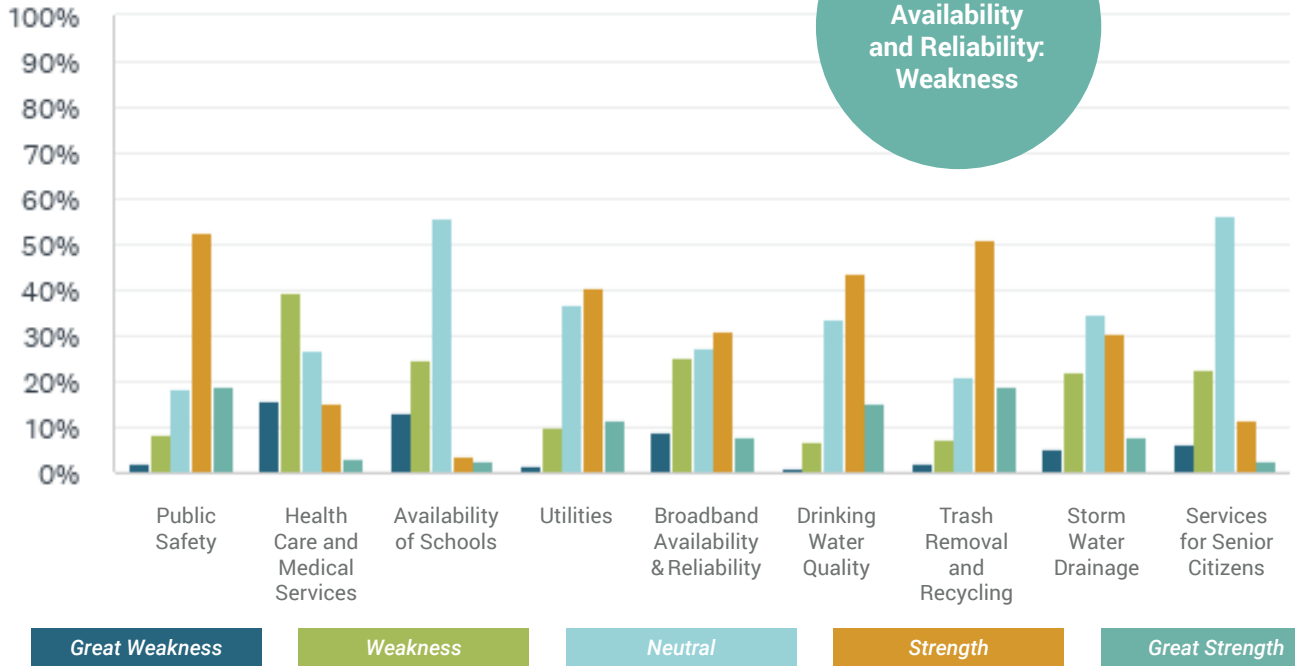


When considering existing housing and residential areas, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for Kiawah today:



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

The comprehensive planning process drew upon numerous existing studies, reports, and strategic documents developed by the Town and key stakeholders. The following plans, studies, and efforts were incorporated into the development of KiawahNext:

Town of Kiawah Island 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

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

Bird Research

The Town's biologists conduct research projects involving the Kiawah's diverse bird population. Capturing birds and banding them with unique identifiers provides biologists with insights into the health and demographics of Kiawah's bird population.

White-tailed Deer

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

American Alligators

The annual survey covers most of Kiawah's ponds, recording the total number of alligators and estimating 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

This plan is envisioned as a living document focusing solely on the marsh ecosystem and integrating various management tools.

Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update

The Town collected traffic data and completed 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, completed in August 2020.

Budget at a Glance

The Town's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Town Council adopts an annual budget to allocate funds for the many programs, services, and projects provided for residents and visitors.

Kiawah Goes Green Initiative

This initiative aims to formalize commitment by Kiawah's major entities, stakeholders, and the community to continue the 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 identifies ways in which rising seas and changing weather patterns might impact Kiawah, assesses potential vulnerabilities to those changes, and suggests practical actions that Kiawah might take to mitigate vulnerabilities and ensure a prosperous future.

Annexation Policy Plan and Procedures Manual

This plan outlines the process and intent of annexation into the Town.

Kiawah Island Stakeholders Plans and Documents:

Kiawah Conservancy 2030 Strategic Plan

This plan lays a foundation to guide 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”: These guidelines encourage construction with excellent architectural design appropriate to the surroundings, unique climate conditions, and other environmental factors indigenous to Kiawah.

Kiawah Island Property Report

This Kiawah Island Real Estate report documents sales data trends on Kiawah.





West track

8b

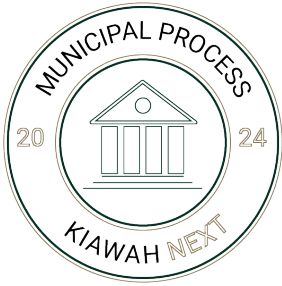
- 01** governance structure
- 02** population
- 03** economic development
- 04** natural resources
- 05** cultural resources
- 06** community facilities
- 07** housing
- 08** land use
- 09** transportation
- 10** priority investments
- 11** resiliency

kiawahneart

part III: plan elements



01



governance structurenext

Goal: Ensure effective coordination among Kiawah’s governance entities and community partnerships.

Governance Structure

While this is not required element, the Town has chosen to include it because of the community’s distinctive governance model. Unlike most municipalities that operate under a single governmental structure, Kiawah functions through a collaborative framework involving the Town and KICA.

Overview

Kiawah operates under a unique governance structure. The Town is responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens and visitors, and handles core municipal functions including public safety, planning and zoning, and building services. KICA is an HOA that provides services to its members, manages security gates, and maintains community infrastructure and amenities.

Effective cooperation between the Town and KICA is essential to address many of Kiawah’s key challenges and maintain 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 interact 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.

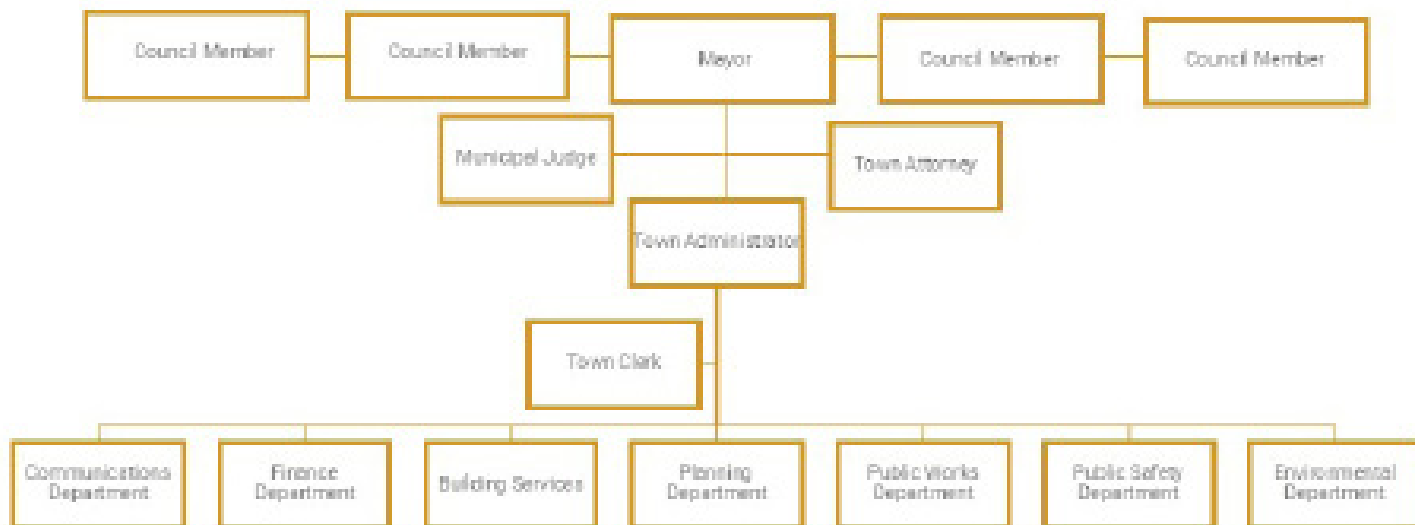
Town Governance Structure

Founded in 1988, the Town operates under the mayor-council form of government. The Town Council, comprising a mayor and four council members, establishes policies that govern the Town’s operations.

The mayor serves as 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 while 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 the 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 and Means Committee

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

Arts and Cultural Events Committee

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

Environmental Committee

This committee studies, supports, and recommends solutions for 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 according to established standards.

Infrastructure and Public Works Committee

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

Kiawah's Unique Governance Model

Kiawah's governance structure sets it apart from traditional communities. Unlike most towns, governance is shared between two primary entities: the Town and KICA. The Town functions as a conventional municipal government, responsible for core public services, policymaking, zoning, building services, beach management, and public safety coordination.

KICA, as the homeowners association, handles many functions that typically fall under municipal purview in other communities. KICA maintains roads and bridges behind the gates, drainage systems, and common areas while operating key amenities and providing security services.

Kiawah's structure sets it apart from traditional communities. The Town is the municipal government responsible for enacting and enforcing ordinances to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens and visitors. Priorities include core public services, policymaking, zoning, building services, beach management, and public safety coordination. What makes Kiawah unique is that KICA provides many services and amenities typically handled by municipalities elsewhere.

KICA serves its members by maintaining roads and bridges behind the gates, drainage systems, and common areas, while operating key amenities and providing 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,

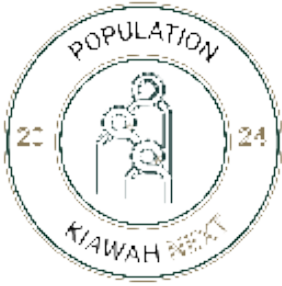
and public safety coordination, while KICA maintains infrastructure behind the gate, operates amenities, and provides essential services like security and landscape maintenance of common areas.

This governance structure requires collaboration that enables Kiawah to maintain high living standards, preserve its natural environment, and address the unique needs of full-time and part-time residents and visitors beyond what a traditional municipal structure alone could achieve. This approach allows for more tailored services, community-driven decision-making, and a balanced approach to development and conservation.

The dual governance model provides multiple avenues for resident involvement through Town Council, the KICA Board, and various commissions and committees, fostering strong community engagement. This structure balances public administration with private community oversight to provide a well-managed, environmentally conscious community that serves both residents and visitors.

02





populationnext

Goal: Accommodate projected population growth while preserving Kiawah’s character and environmental quality.

Population

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

Overview

Kiawah’s population consists of full-time residents, part-time homeowners, and visitors, including traditional vacationers and emerging day visitors. This composition creates a dynamic community that expands and contracts seasonally, with pronounced fluctuations during peak tourism periods and holidays.

These natural population rhythms are intensifying as growth is anticipated across all segments over the coming decade. New residential developments outside Kiawah’s main gate are contributing to the rise of day visitors as a distinct segment, as a distinct segment because these residents gain access to Kiawah amenities through Kiawah Island Golf Resort and Kiawah Island Club. Additionally, Kiawah sits adjacent to Johns

Island, whose population growth rates far exceed Kiawah’s, creating additional stress on shared roads and infrastructure that serve both communities.

This unique and evolving demographic composition presents both challenges and opportunities for long-term planning. This Population element examines Kiawah’s demographics through historical trends, current data, and future projections. By understanding the needs and impacts of all population segments, this element seeks to guide future development that serves the entire community while preserving Kiawah’s natural beauty and quality of life.

Population Growth on Kiawah and Johns Island

Since 2000, Kiawah Island's full-time¹ resident population has grown from 1,163 to **2,066** in 2023, a compound annual growth rate of 2.4 percent. Kiawah's population grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic as many people 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 maintain seasonal residency on Kiawah. These residents significantly impact Kiawah's character and economy, especially during peak seasons.

This blend of full-time and part-time residents underscores Kiawah's attractiveness as both a primary and second-home community while 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 compound annual growth rate of 4.72 percent.

The combined growth patterns of Kiawah 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

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 both year-round residents and seasonal visitors.

Population Growth, Town of 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
- d) Are captured by the census as having a secondary residence on Kiawah Island

Kiawah's Population Profile

Kiawah is experiencing a demographic shift that will influence long-range planning as its full-time resident population ages in place. The median age has risen from 63.5 years in 2010 to 68.3 years in 2023. Nearly half of all full-time residents (44.3 percent) are now between ages 65 and 74, underscoring the extent of this demographic transformation according to U.S. Census Bureau data from the decennial Census and American Community Survey.

This aging trend among full-time residents highlights 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 Kiawah.

Kiawah exhibits a unique multigenerational dynamic that influences its character and planning needs. While the full-time resident population tends to be older, Kiawah's appeal as a premier vacation destination attracts visitors of all ages throughout the year.

This diverse visitor¹ profile includes families with young children on summer beach vacations, young professionals seeking luxury getaways, groups on golf and tennis retreats, retirees exploring potential retirement locations, and multigenerational family groups gathering for reunions or holidays. Day visitors include off-island Kiawah Island Club or KIGR Governor's Club members who have access privileges to the island.

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.

Versatile community spaces help Kiawah address these varied demographics. Freshfields Village and the proposed Andell West are examples of developments that foster a vibrant community atmosphere which encourage intergenerational interaction. These areas combine residential, commercial, and recreational elements that cater to diverse needs.

The Town's approach to land use planning should aim to foster 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 now and in the future.

Kiawah's Household and Regional Impact Growth and Infrastructure

Understanding Kiawah's Growth Pattern

Kiawah's growth story differs fundamentally from traditional residential communities. While the U.S. Census recorded 1,135 occupied households with 2,196 residents in 2023—up from 772 households and 1,638 residents in 2010—these figures represented only only Kiawah's full-time residential population. This census data

¹Visitors:

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.

captures approximately 29% of Kiawah’s total housing stock.

The remaining 71% of Kiawah’s housing serves a different function. As of August 2025, approximately 1,351 properties—roughly 35% of all housing units—operate under short-term rental business licenses. The balance consists of part-time owners who use their properties seasonally. This housing composition means that Kiawah’s actual population and infrastructure demands vary throughout the year, with seasonal population surges exceeding what census figures suggest.

Approaching Development Build-Out

Kiawah is nearing completion of its development capacity. With 4,087 existing residential units and then are 263 currently under construction. Total residential units at build-out could reach 4,800 to 5,200 units. The upper range depends on KIGR’s allocation decisions between residential and hotel development.

Most future residential development will comprise of multifamily properties and visitor accommodations rather than traditional single-family homes for full-time residents. This trajectory could amplify Kiawah’s seasonal population fluctuations and visitor-driven service demands rather than significantly expanding the full-time residential base.

Regional Growth Pressures

Johns Island experienced greater growth than Kiawah between 2010 and 2023, adding 3,343 households at an annual rate of 3.8 percent. This growth impacts Kiawah by increasing pressure on shared infrastructure, including access road, beach,

resort amenities, and Freshfields Village.

Infrastructure and Planning Imperatives

Kiawah’s infrastructure and community services must be planned not just for full-time residents, but for peak seasonal populations that are several multiples higher. The short-term rentals and part-time ownership creates unique challenges in forecasting service demands, maintaining community character, and managing facilities that experience intense seasonal utilization followed by periods of lower occupancy.

Given Kiawah’s geography as a barrier island with limited access, the Town needs to carefully manage the main artery to handle fluctuating demands. This management includes strategic planning for traffic on the single access road, especially during peak seasons and events. For off-island areas within Town limits, coordinated planning is essential to ensure that services and amenities can effectively serve year-round residents and seasonal visitors while minimizing impact on Kiawah’s limited access points.

These development dynamics, both on the island and off-island areas within the Town are critical to the Town’s future planning. By adapting to these changes thoughtfully, Kiawah can evolve mindfully, maintaining its unique appeal while meeting the diverse needs of residents and visitors, which ensures sustainable management of the community’s transition toward build-out.

~~Kiawah’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 percent. One and two-person households overwhelmingly dominate Kiawah's residential population, accounting for more than 90% of all households. This pattern aligns with Kiawah'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 Kiawah'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, Kiawah experiences a significant population influx, temporarily altering its household composition and service demands.

According to the Environmental Systems Research Institute, Johns Island grew more rapidly than Kiawah between 2010 and 2023, adding 4,372 households at an annual rate of 4.3 percent. This increase significantly impacts Kiawah by 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 limits, 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 existing infrastructure and services to handle fluctuating demands. This management includes strategic planning for traffic on the single-access road, especially during peak seasons and events.

For off-island areas within 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 2022 five-year estimates, providing the most current official information available:

Median household income varies across the region. Kiawah's median household income of \$214,250 compares to Johns Island \$103,902 and Charleston County's \$80,401.

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

Additional economic indicators for Kiawah include a per capita income of \$197,853 and

a median home value of \$1,423,900.

For context, Charleston County has a per capita income of \$52,484, and the Johns Island Census County Division reports a per capita income of \$50,833.

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

Note: Data reflects full-time residents only.

03





economic developmentnext

Goal: Support the continued vitality of the 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

Kiawah’s economy centers on tourism, residential development, and resort operations. These sectors support an estimated 6,500 jobs, with employment levels fluctuating seasonally based on visitor demand.

Kiawah’s transformation from a primarily seasonal destination to a year-round economic engine reflects its evolution as both a vacation destination and a residential community. Kiawah’s appeal attracts visitors who support local businesses and generate regional revenue through accommodations taxes, hospitality spending, and retail activity. A number of visitors become residents, creating a cycle of economic growth and community investment.

The Town maintains a strong fiscal position with approximately \$17.5 million budgeted in FY25-26 in annual revenues and substantial reserve funds, all achieved without imposing a municipal property tax

on residents.

This section examines the Town’s economic vitality by analyzing trends in tourism taxes, employment growth, and fiscal management. It highlights Kiawah’s commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship while ensuring economic development aligns with natural resource preservation. This approach maintains Kiawah’s distinctive character while enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors and securing its appeal as a premier residential and vacation destination.

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 percent. As Kiawah's largest employer, KIGR employs 1,700 people and ranks as the eighth-largest private employer in the Charleston region. Kiawah Island Club is another major employer.

Town Revenue FY26

The Town's revenue comprises unrestricted and restricted funds, each playing a crucial role in the Town's financial landscape. The total budgeted revenue for FY25-26 was \$17.6 million, with restricted funds accounting for 41 percent and unrestricted funds for 59 percent.

Unrestricted Funds: General Fund Revenues (59% of total revenue, \$10.3M)

These funds provide greater flexibility in their use:

1. Business License Fees (41% of unrestricted funds, \$4.2M)
2. Building Permits (15% of unrestricted funds, \$1.6M)
3. Solid Waste Fees (12% of unrestricted funds, \$1.3M)
4. Franchise Fees (10% of unrestricted funds, \$1M)
5. Local Option Tax (10% of unrestricted funds, \$1M)
6. Other unrestricted funds (12% of unrestricted funds, \$1.2M) including court fines, investment income, and miscellaneous sources.

Restricted Funds (41% of total revenue, \$7.3M)

These funds must be used for specific tourism-related purposes:

1. State Accommodation Tax (SATAX) (42% of restricted funds, \$3.1M): Hotel and rental guests pay a 2 percent state accommodation tax. Most of this revenue must be used for tourism-related expenses. The SATAX Committee recommends how to allocate these funds, subject to Town Council approval.
2. Local Accommodation Tax (26% of restricted funds, \$1.9M): The Town imposes a 1 percent local accommodation tax. These funds are restricted to tourism-related expenses, including cultural events and maintaining public beach access roads.
3. County Accommodation Tax (11% of restricted funds, \$780K): Charleston County collects a 2 percent accommodation tax, returning about 25 percent to the Town. This revenue must fund tourism-related capital projects or services.
4. Hospitality Tax (15% of restricted funds, \$1.1M): A 1 percent 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 (6% of restricted funds, \$440K).

Restricted Funds

In FY25-26, these funds supported tourism-related activities and expenditures, including beach patrol, public safety initiatives, arts and cultural events, and marketing and regional tourism promotion.

Source: Town of Kiawah Island, Budget-At-A-Glance FY25-26 Budget

Financial Position and Performance

Based on the Town's FY25 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, the Town maintains a strong financial position:

Financial Highlights

- Total Assets: \$64 million as of June 30, 2025
- Total Liabilities: \$5.5 million
- Net Position: \$59.6 million, with \$35.5 million unrestricted

Revenue Performance

- Total revenues reached \$20 million in FY25.
- Tourism-driven revenues remain strong:
 - Accommodations taxes generated \$5.5 million
 - Business licenses produced \$4.9 million
 - Building permits contributed \$3 million

Fund Balance

The Town's combined fund balance increased to \$48 million. This includes:

- \$6.5 million restricted for tourism-related expenditures

- \$11 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.

The Town currently does not impose a municipal property tax. All property taxes paid by residents go directly to Charleston County. Should the Town require additional revenue in the future, a mechanism is in place that would require the support of Kiawah residents.

Kiawah's Property Tax Impact

The property taxes paid by Kiawah property owners have a substantial impact on the regional economy:

- **In FY24**, Kiawah generated over \$96 million in property tax revenues for Charleston County:
 - Sixty-five percent (65%) funds the Charleston County School District Budget.
 - Twenty percent (20%) funds the Charleston County Administration budget.
 - Twelve percent (12%) funds the St. Johns Fire District budget
 - Three percent (3%) funds the Charleston County Parks and Recreation, and Trident Technical College

This substantial contribution underscores Kiawah's critical role as a major revenue source for Charleston County, with property

tax contributions directly supporting education, public safety, county operations, and community services throughout the region.

Source: Charleston County Treasurer's office, Information based on FY23 Collection Information.

Key Financial Trends and Considerations:

1. **Tourism Recovery:** Tourism-related taxes exhibited moderate growth from 2014 to 2019, declined during the 2020 pandemic, and rebounded strongly in 2021-2023. State accommodation tax revenue increased from a pandemic low of \$1.3 million in 2020 to \$3 million by 2023, **then stabilized at \$2.9 million in 2024 and \$3 million in 2025**, indicating a shift toward a more consistent year-round tourism economy that has reached a steady post-pandemic level.
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 percent decline in 2023. **The revenue rebounded in 2024 to \$4.6 million and continued growing to \$4.9 million in 2025**, demonstrating sustained business activity.
3. **Development Fees:** As Kiawah approaches full development, revenue from new construction permits may decline. However, this decline could be offset by an increase in renovation permits for older structures.

The balanced mix of restricted and unrestricted funds allows the Town to support both tourism-related initiatives and essential municipal 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, 2015-2025.

Impact of Tourism on Kiawah's Economy

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

1. **Job Creation:** The tourism industry serves as a major employer within the Town, with employment trends fluctuating based on seasonal demand patterns.
2. **Business Stimulation:** Tourism supports a vibrant retail sector that represents about a quarter of all jobs in Kiawah, including 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 strengthening the local real estate market.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** Tourism revenues help fund infrastructure improvements that benefit both visitors and residents, such as beach maintenance, road improvements, and public facilities.
5. **Regional Impact:** Kiawah's tourism industry contributes significantly to the broader regional economy, generating over \$96 million in property tax revenues for Charleston County that fund 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: Tourism trends suggest movement toward a more consistent, year-round economy rather than a peak season-focused model. This transition 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 25 years, Kiawah has transformed its tourism landscape, evolving from a primarily domestic, seasonal destination to a year-round, internationally recognized luxury vacation destination.

In the 2000s, Kiawah began gaining greater national recognition as its pristine beaches and world-class golf courses attracted a growing number of visitors.

Hosting 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 have brought immediate economic benefits while enhancing Kiawah’s long-term appeal to high-end travelers.

The addition of The Sanctuary, a five-star oceanfront hotel, elevated Kiawah’s accommodation offerings and helped

attract a more affluent clientele. Average visitor spending per trip has steadily increased, reaching \$1,062 by 2022, up from \$878 in 2019.

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

From 2019 to 2024, vacation rentals on Kiawah demonstrated fluctuating occupancy rates alongside consistent growth in average daily rates. The data reveals several important trends:

Occupancy rates fluctuated significantly during this period, starting at 52.8 percent in 2019, peaking at 79 percent in 2021 during the pandemic, then stabilizing around 62-69 percent as travel patterns normalized. However, average daily rates showed consistent upward movement, growing from \$366 in 2019 to \$511 in 2024—a 40 percent increase. This pricing resilience, even as occupancy moderated from pandemic highs, demonstrates that Kiawah has successfully captured and retained a more affluent guest segment willing to pay premium rates.

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

However, this growth has not occurred without challenges. Kiawah has had to balance tourism development with

environmental conservation while maintaining the natural beauty that attracts visitors in the first place. The Town has implemented various environmental programs and regulations to protect Kiawah 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 Kiawah 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 while affecting both visitors and residents.

The seasonal nature of tourism has created workforce challenges, as many service industry workers cannot afford housing in or near Kiawah. This situation has resulted in longer commutes for essential staff and occasional workforce shortages during peak periods.

Looking ahead, the Town is focusing on sustainable tourism practices 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.

Tourism has been a transformative force for Kiawah over the past two decades, driving economic growth, enhancing the Kiawah's global reputation, and contributing 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 ongoing challenge will be maintaining its distinctive 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

Goal: 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 spans over 4,500 acres of vibrant tidal salt marsh, ten miles of pristine beachfront, 365 acres of tranquil water surfaces, lush shrub thickets, and expansive maritime forests, standing as a testament to the community’s dedication to preserving this extraordinary environment. With 345 acres of conserved barrier island habitat, the community demonstrates a steadfast commitment to sustainability.

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

Living With Nature

Kiawah has consistently strived to balance development with the preservation of natural landscapes, a commitment dating to the community’s inception in 1974. As Kiawah approaches full development, the focus has 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, the beach, dunes, wetlands, and diverse wildlife habitats.

Kiawah’s commitment to environmental stewardship manifests in several key ways, including protecting critical habitats that support native species ranging from bobcats to loggerhead turtles as they coexist with human residents. These habitat areas are preserved through collaborative efforts among the Town, KICA, and the Kiawah Conservancy.

Water management plays a crucial role in living with nature on Kiawah. KICA's sophisticated drainage systems and pond network are designed to work in harmony with natural water flow patterns, helping prevent erosion while providing essential habitats for wildlife. Regular 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 preserve and enhance Kiawah's natural environment while protecting significant trees and forests for present and future generations. The ordinance establishes 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 while handling special circumstances regarding tree removal.

Using native species in landscaping is strongly encouraged not only for aesthetic purposes but also 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.

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. This engagement helps create 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 demonstrates how simple adaptations can protect wildlife.

Environmental adaptability is integrated into Kiawah's Living with Nature approach. Natural systems, such as maritime forests and dunes, serve as critical infrastructure that help 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 Kiawah's wildlife and natural beauty. This approach acknowledges that successful stewardship requires ongoing adaptation and commitment from all community members to preserve Kiawah'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 diverse ecosystems through several initiatives:

- **Marsh Management:** Monitoring and preserving the expansive salt marshes, which is critical for protecting against storm surges while providing habitat for diverse species.
- **Beach and Dune System Protection:** Implementing erosion control and dune restoration projects to safeguard ten 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 to monitor the health and movement of local species, including bobcats, alligators, and sea turtles, to better understand and protect their habitats.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Promote sustainable building practices and green infrastructure that minimize environmental impact while preserving Kiawah’s natural character.
- **Grow Native Initiative:** Supporting biodiversity by promoting and preserving native plant species throughout Kiawah, creating sustainable habitats for local wildlife.
- **Wildlife Protection Programs:** Implementing specialized initiatives including Turtle Patrol, Shorebird Stewardship, Marine Mammal Dolphin Strand Feeding, and the Bobcat Guardian Program to safeguard the island’s diverse wildlife populations.
- **Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation:** Comprehensive studies to address the challenges posed by rising sea levels and increased flooding.

Public engagement is at the heart of the conservation mission. Kiawah offers numerous ways to connect with our natural heritage. Residents and visitors can visit the Nature Center at Night Heron Park to learn

about local wildlife and witness the unique phenomenon of dolphin strand feeding.

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

Grow Native Plant Database

The Town is dedicated to educating property owners about Kiawah’s natural resources. The Grow Native Plant Database serves as an invaluable resource for residents and property owners, providing detailed information on native plant species that promote healthy and sustainable habitat unique to Kiawah. This resource provides guidelines for 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. The Conservancy provides 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.gov.

Wildlife Research and Monitoring

The wildlife of Kiawah plays a critical role in the health of the fragile ecosystems cherished by residents and visitors. 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 Kiawah’s diverse avian population. Town biologists conduct various projects, with bird banding serving as a primary research tool. This technique involves capturing birds and attaching unique identifiers, to provide crucial insights into the health, demographics, and movements of different species.

Key components of the program include the following research activities:

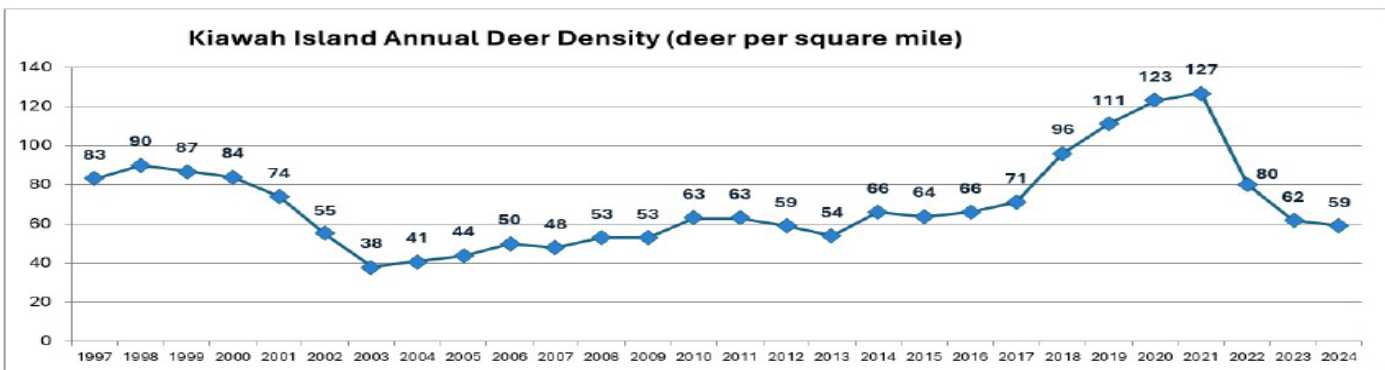
1. Fall Migration Monitoring: Daily banding from August 15 to November 30 at two locations to study songbirds during migration.
2. Winter Banding: Conducted from December through March, focusing on wintering songbird populations, especially Yellow-rumped Warblers.

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 while addressing conservation concerns related to habitat loss and sea-level rise.
5. Wilson’s Plover Banding: Tracks movements and nesting success of this beach-nesting species.
6. MOTUS Bird Tracking: Two stations on Kiawah 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 while helping protect 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 to 80 deer per square mile has become crucial. To address this challenge, a deer harvest program was initiated in 2021. This measure



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

is essential for preventing the disruption of Kiawah’s vital habitats, which can occur when deer populations exceed sustainable levels.

Bobcats

The Town Bobcat GPS Project represents an ongoing tracking effort started in 2007 by the Town and the Kiawah Conservancy. Five juvenile bobcats wore GPS collars during the 2024 trapping season. This information is used to protect key habitat areas where bobcats are located, which specifically include Captain Sam’s Spit and the eastern portion of Cougar Island. Generally, bobcats use scrub-shrub, forest, and developed areas for hunting while utilizing scrub-shrub and dunes for resting. Bobcat populations have declined since 2017, attributed to second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide poisoning. Public awareness efforts have been implemented to eliminate the use of this deadly rodenticide.

American Alligators

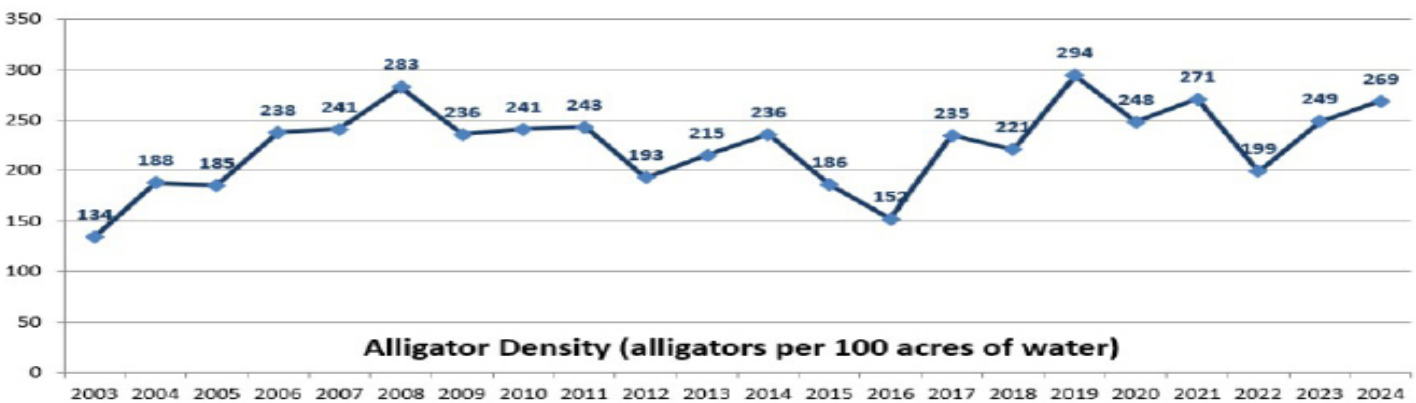
Kiawah is home to a thriving population of American alligators, with estimates suggesting nearly 700 animals inhabiting Kiawah. This significant alligator presence coexists with permanent residents and visitors, creating a unique environment where human-alligator interactions are commonplace.

Recognizing the importance of maintaining safe coexistence, the Town and KICA have implemented a comprehensive research program. This initiative aims to gain better understanding of alligator behavior and movements, thereby enhancing awareness and safety across Kiawah.

A key component of this program is the annual survey of alligators across most of Kiawah’s ponds. These surveys provide crucial data on population density and distribution while 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, the Town and KICA strive to ensure that interactions between people and alligators remain as safe as possible while preserving the island’s unique ecological balance and protecting residents and visitors.



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

Turtle Patrol

Kiawah is home to extensive loggerhead turtle habitat. With over ten miles of beachfront, Kiawah serves as a vital nesting ground for endangered turtles. The nesting process is especially vulnerable, as 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 this group of residents and non-resident volunteers since 1990.

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

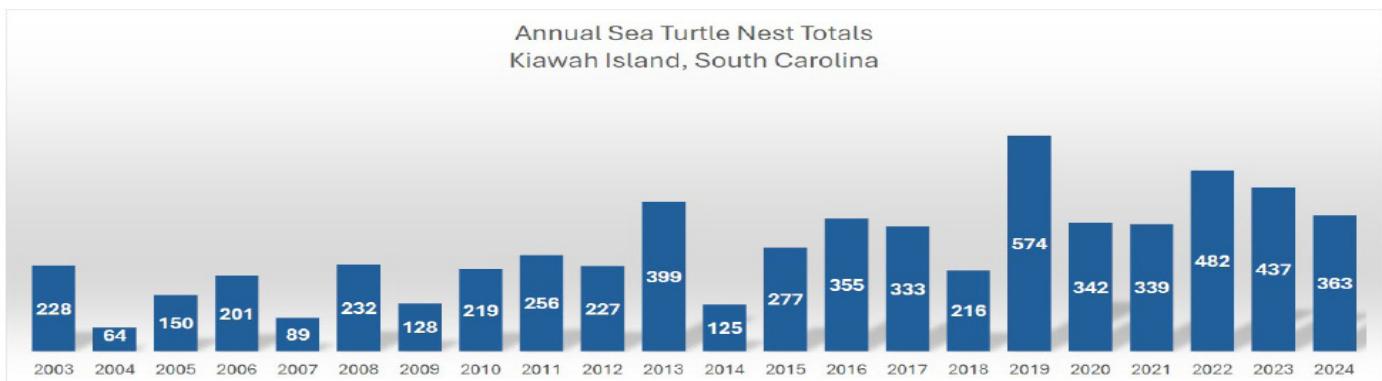
Low-lying nests are relocated to protect against tidal overwash. Volunteers patrol the beach daily during hatching season, monitoring the emergence of hatchlings. After hatching, nests are excavated and inventoried. Detailed records of all activities are reported annually to the South Carolina Department 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 to minimize disturbance during these critical life activities.

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

Shorebird populations have declined 70 percent nationally since the 1970s. The program engages beachgoers about habitat needs through trained volunteer stewards while conducting beach patrols, monitoring critical areas, and promoting wildlife-friendly practices such as leashing dogs and avoiding dunes.



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

Dolphin Education Program

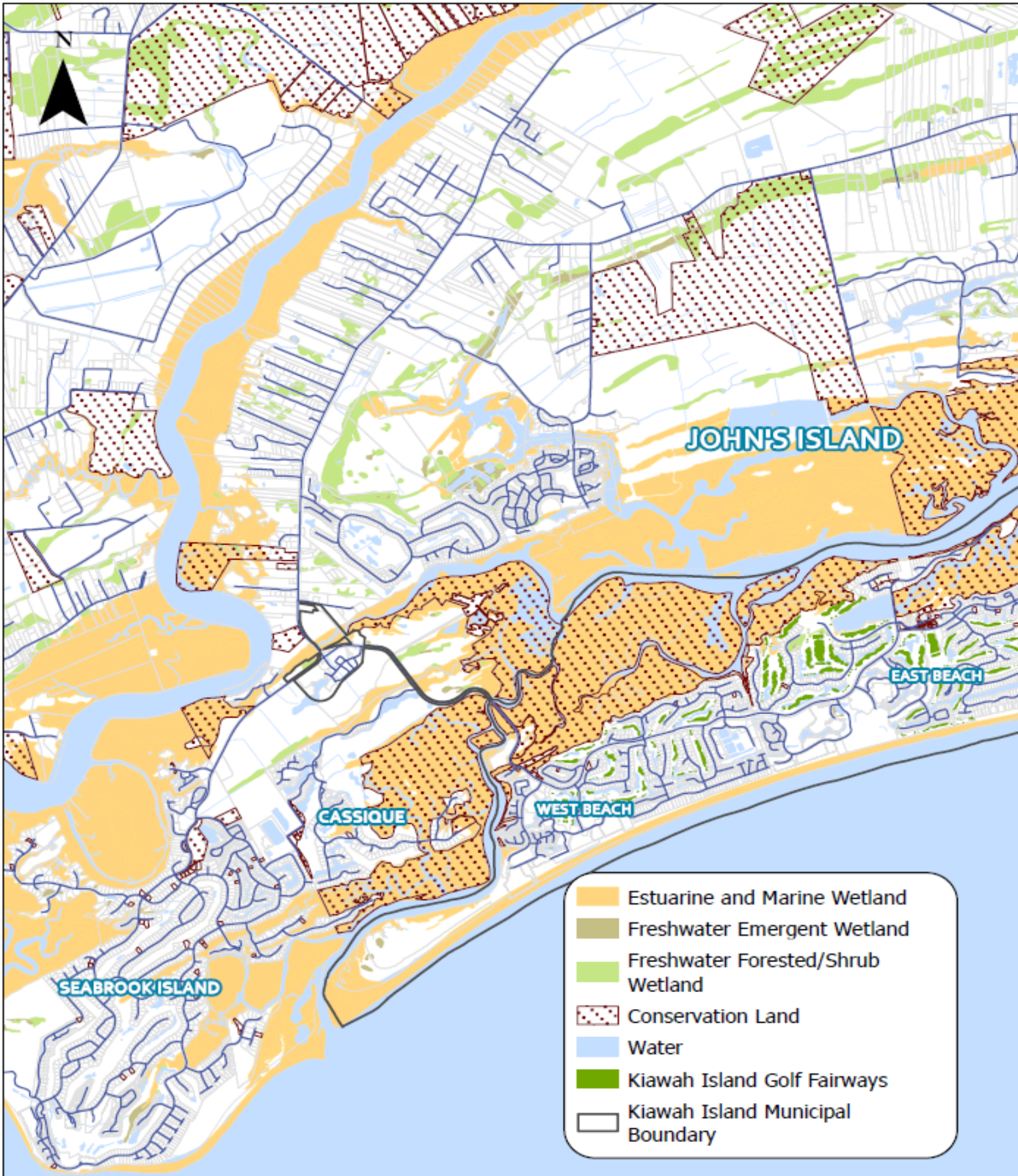
Kiawah is one of few locations in the United States where bottlenose dolphins exhibit strand feeding, a unique hunting behavior where dolphins work together to herd fish onto shore. The Town partners with the Lowcountry Marine Mammal Network to study and protect this rare behavior through a monitoring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

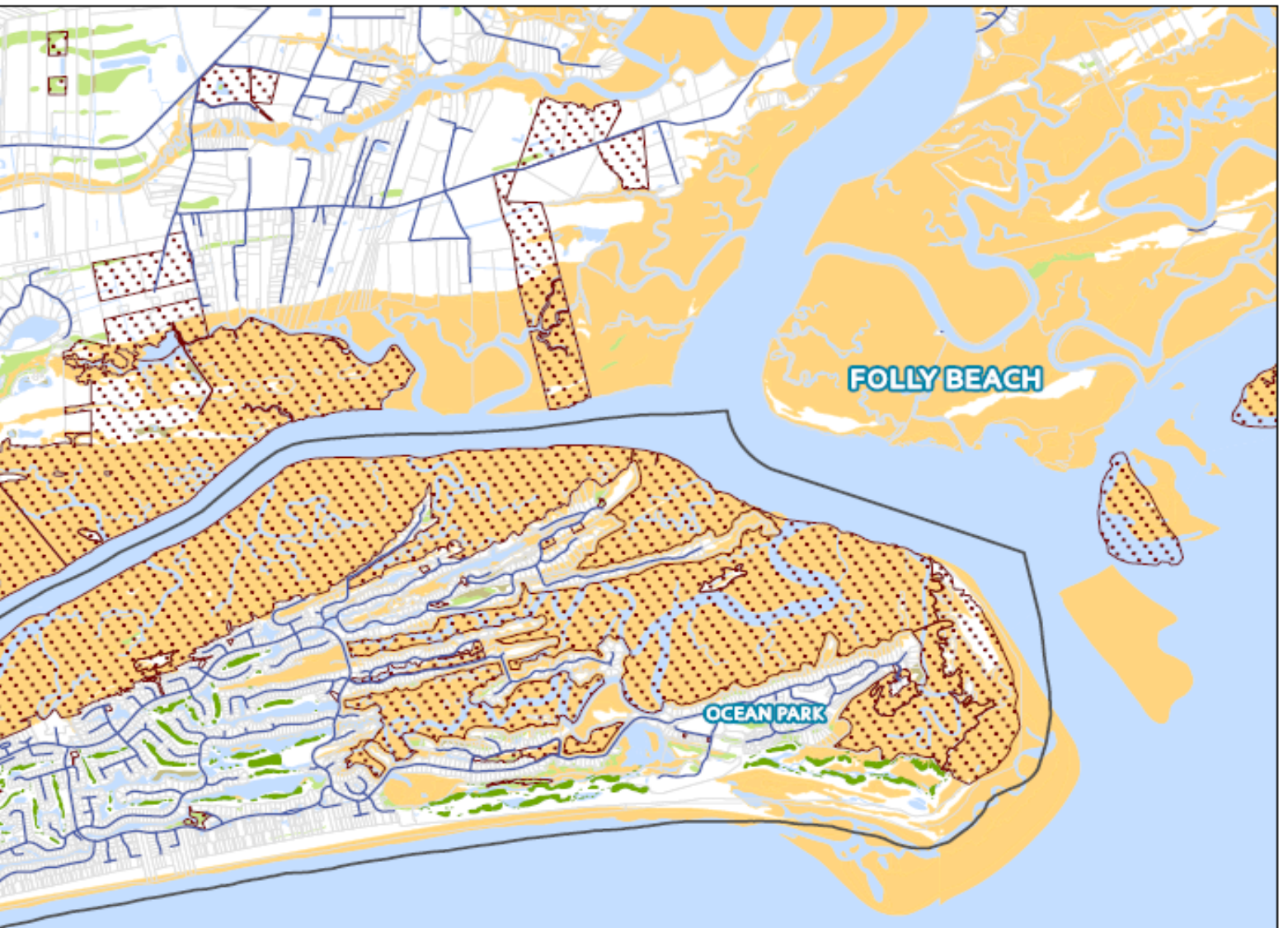
Through this research initiative, twelve individual dolphins have been identified as regular strand feeders in Kiawah’s waters, with some having sighting histories spanning over twenty years. The program has documented critical behaviors, including mothers teaching their young to strand feed while demonstrating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

The program combines scientific monitoring with public education to prevent harassment while maintaining appropriate viewing distances as mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Trained educators conduct beach monitoring during peak feeding times while engaging with visitors and collecting behavioral data. This

approach has successfully reduced human interference while advancing 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 and dune 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 because 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 while creating conditions that promote sand accumulation and shoreline expansion. These shoals effectively shelter the eastern end of Kiawah from northeast winds and waves while establishing a zone where sand naturally settles and accumulates.

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

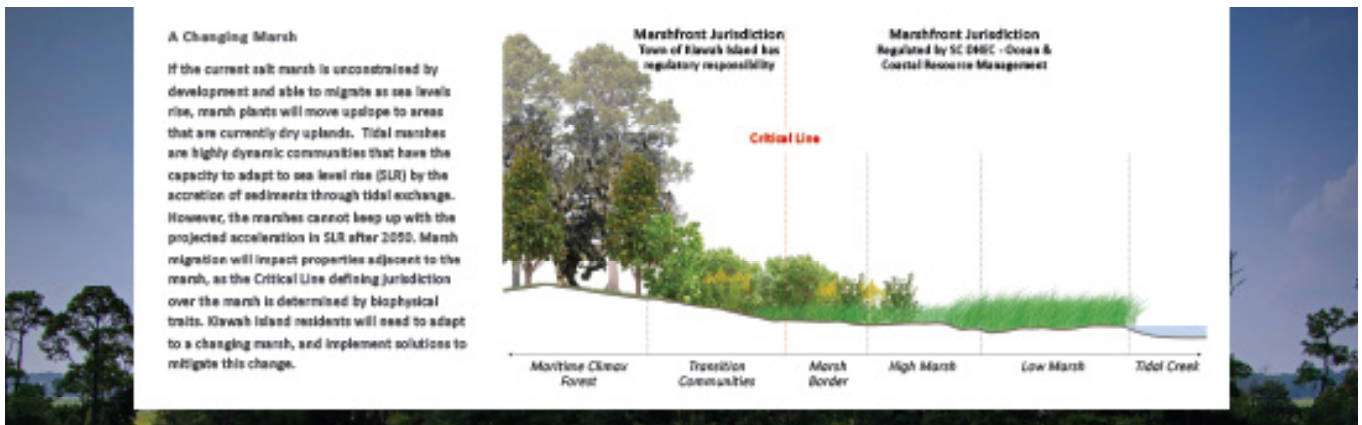
The Town's Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan serves as a crucial planning and decision-making tool, fulfilling the requirements established by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services - Bureau of Coastal Management (SCDES - BCM) for beachfront municipalities. Since incorporation 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 comprehensive revisions in 2012 and 2020, with the current plan updated in 2025. The next update is scheduled for 2030.

Through this management plan, the Town maintains a proactive approach with regular monitoring and strategic restoration projects. Notable interventions include two major restoration projects on East End Beach, which addressed erosion concerns near residential areas and the Ocean Course. Following Hurricane Irma's, the Town completed a sand scraping project from 2017 to 2018 that successfully rebuilding damaged dunes along the beachfront.

Kiawah falls within Phase II of South Carolina's beachfront jurisdictional lines review process, beginning in spring and summer 2026. The Bureau of Coastal Management establishes and reviews two critical jurisdictional lines—the baseline (seaward) and the setback line (landward)—every seven to ten years. These lines delineate the state's direct permitting authority for activities within the beach and dune system critical area.

Activities within these jurisdictional lines require SCDES-BCM review and authorization. In addition to state requirements, the Town maintains its own regulatory authority and requires separate Town permits for certain activities, including but not limited to beach walkovers, as set forth in the Town's applicable ordinances.



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 by filtering water, absorbing rainwater to slow flooding effects, providing habitat for diverse species, and acting as a protective barrier against storms and flooding.

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

Several studies on water quality and wetland health have been conducted to monitor Kiawah’s natural environment. The Kiawah Conservancy completed a watershed and groundwater table study in 2022, while 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 among the Town, KICA, and the Kiawah Island Conservancy. Potential restoration methods include thin layer placement, prescribed burning, resilience terracing, and oyster reestablishment.

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

Key Indicators: UVVR & Shoreline Change



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



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 serves as 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 up-coast 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 while 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 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 2024 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.

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 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 that 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 one million cubic yards of sand currently attaching to the island. This natural process is vital for replenishing beach volumes while maintaining the overall health of the coastal ecosystem.

Marsh habitats and drainage systems further underscore the East End's environmental significance. Two flushing channels that opened after Hurricanes Matthew in 2016 and Irma in 2017 remain active, providing crucial drainage for the east-end marshes. These marshes serve as important habitat for various species while playing a key role in Kiawah's ecological balance.

The area is particularly significant for

wildlife, especially threatened species such as the piping plover. The dynamic nature of the East End, with its shifting shorelines and diverse habitats, provides crucial 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 provides both storm protection and support for 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 because it may need minor remedial action to ensure proper marsh drainage.

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 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 acknowledges Kiawah’s historical roots from indigenous origins through its evolution as a premier coastal community, while focusing primarily on contemporary cultural offerings.

Kiawah’s cultural foundation rests on a historical narrative that begins with the Kiawah Native Americans as original stewards and continues through colonial plantation agriculture, Civil War and Reconstruction challenges, mid-twentieth century timber operations, and the transformative 1974 development as a world-class resort community. This historical evolution has shaped Kiawah’s current character as both a residential community and premier destination.

Contemporary cultural life centers on several institutions and programs. The Town-funded Arts and Cultural Events Council, established in 2004, provides programming ranging from intimate concerts to events featuring prestigious institutions. The Art Guild of Kiawah hosts annual exhibitions showcasing local resident artists’ work. Recreational and educational opportunities include programming through KIGR Nature Program, and the Kiawah Conservancy’s environmental education initiatives.

While cultural amenities are offered through various Kiawah organizations, a significant opportunity exists to enhance public cultural infrastructure through a potential Town civic and cultural center.

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's agricultural legacy. This legacy continued under the stewardship of the Vanderhorst family, who maintained the plantation until the Civil War.

The Civil War marked a significant turning point for Kiawah 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 formerly enslaved person and son of the plantation's previous owner, assumed a managerial role. His position exemplified the evolving social dynamics of the time.

The mid-twentieth century heralded a new chapter for Kiawah. In 1950, C.C. Royal 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 Kiawah Island Resort in 1976, complete with its inn, amenities, and golf course, established the foundation for Kiawah's current reputation.

Today, Kiawah stands as a testament to thoughtful development, offering an unparalleled living experience. The island's journey reflects the Lowcountry's broader narrative, making Kiawah a place of both natural beauty and significant historical interest.

Arts and Cultural Activities and Events

Kiawah boasts a carefully curated cultural programming calendar that reflects its status as a premier coastal community. The Town's commitment to artistic excellence is evident in the caliber of events hosted throughout the year. Established in 2004, the Town-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 range from casual piano bars at the Sandcastle to intimate concerts featuring world-renowned artists and prestigious institutions such as 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 through 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.

Civic and Cultural Center

The Town is planning for a new civic and cultural center addition 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 features an acoustically engineered 250- to 300-seat auditorium, flexible community rooms, and open gathering areas on municipal land with scenic views. As an addition to Town Hall or a standalone facility, it could share infrastructure, enhance efficiencies, and combine staffing. The Town is still assessing this concept with no final decision made.

Recreational and Educational Activities

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

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

KIGR offers instruction and excursions for golfers of all 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 while ranking among the top tennis resorts globally.

The organization engages residents in conservation efforts while enhancing understanding of Kiawah's ecosystems through nature walks, workshops on native flora, resilience and sustainability topics, and citizen science initiatives.

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 community facilities operate through a multi-entity service delivery model that reflects Kiawah’s geography and governance structure. This collaborative approach involves numerous organizations working together to provide essential services within Town limits.

Utility services are provided through a network of providers: Berkeley Electric Cooperative manages electrical service, Kiawah Island Utility serves on-island water and wastewater needs, and Seabrook Island Utility serves Freshfields and surrounding areas. Telecommunications services are provided by multiple carriers.

Public safety operates under a collaborative model coordinated among Charleston County EMS, Charleston County Sheriff’s Office, the St. Johns Fire District, and Barrier Island

Ocean Rescue for emergency services, while the Town’s Public Safety Department employs Community Service Officers for code enforcement and community safety.

Future infrastructure investments include the Medical University of South Carolina Sea Islands Medical Pavilion opening in late 2025. The Town recognizes opportunities for improvement through proposed initiatives including establishing a Central Communications Channel for unified emergency communications and developing public community gathering spaces to address current gaps in accessible public amenities.



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 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 maintains a Public Safety Department under the leadership of a Public Safety Director. The department employs Community Service Officers (CSOs), who serve as the Town's code enforcement officers responsible for ensuring community standards and municipal regulations are consistently maintained throughout Kiawah.

These officers work multiple shifts to provide ongoing coverage while serving as the primary enforcement presence during

normal daytime hours. Their responsibilities include:

- Conducting regular patrols throughout Kiawah
- Monitoring compliance with municipal ordinances
- Responding to code violations and incidents
- Managing traffic and community safety concerns
- Providing community safety education and emergency preparedness initiatives
- Collaborating with property owners to resolve issues according to established procedures

Recognizing the need for comprehensive coverage beyond traditional business hours, the Town contracts with Barrier Island Ocean Rescue (BIOR) to provide evening and weekend code enforcement services. This partnership serves dual purposes, as BIOR personnel manage both beach safety operations and code enforcement along the shoreline while supporting the Town’s broader code enforcement efforts during evenings and weekends.

Kiawah Island Community Association provides security services for areas behind the main gate, while KIGR manages security operations for its respective properties, ensuring comprehensive safety coverage across Kiawah’s various jurisdictions.

The Town operates under a collaborative law enforcement model with the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office. As the Town does not maintain its own police force, law enforcement services are provided by the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office, consistent with standard

county-level coverage for municipalities without dedicated police departments. To supplement this baseline service, the Town contracts with the Sheriff’s Office through a third-party vendor for additional off-duty deputy coverage during weekends, peak holidays, town-sponsored events, and other periods when enhanced coverage is deemed necessary.

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 Sea Islands Medical Pavilion is scheduled to open in late 2025, marking a significant investment in healthcare infrastructure to serve the Sea Islands. 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 to build a future station within the Kiawah River development, located off Betsy Kerrison Parkway. These facilities address growing needs created by recent residential development. Geographic distance from existing facilities currently means longer travel times for residents seeking emergency and routine medical care.

Utility Service Providers

Various private entities provide utility services. The Town's goal is to ensure the highest quality of service, regardless of which entity is responsible for provision.

To achieve this goal, the Town will conduct a comprehensive review of all utility providers to ensure they maintain high-quality service. This review should ensure that appropriate investment is made to upgrade aging infrastructure while confirming that contingency plans are in place to provide uninterrupted services during storms and other emergencies.

Water and Wastewater Facilities

The Town is served by two utility providers: Kiawah Island Utility (KIU) and the Seabrook Island Utility Commission (SIUC). Each operates independently to serve its communities with essential water and wastewater services. Both utilities purchase water from St. Johns Water Company, which sources water from the 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 water and wastewater collection system and treatment facility that serves properties on the island. This facility processes wastewater through an advanced treatment system before using the treated effluent 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 installation provides system redundancy.

Seabrook Island Utility Commission

SIUC, which the Town of Seabrook Island owns, provides wastewater services to Freshfields Village, which is located within the Town limits of Kiawah. **St. Johns Water Company provides water service to Freshfields Village.**

Municipal Center Utilities

The Town's Municipal Center receives water service from St. Johns Water Company and operates on a septic system for wastewater management. The Town is currently exploring sewer connection options with either 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 collection. Garbage service is available through both curbside and back-door collection.

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, at the Municipal Center, and behind the KICA homeowners' association building.

Electric

Berkeley Electric Cooperative (BEC) provides electrical service to Kiawah. All electrical lines are installed underground. Between 2008 and 2010, BEC completed improvements to these lines to minimize outages, 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 serves as Kiawah’s primary network provider, delivering cellular, cable, and internet services. Additional cellular 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.

Kiawah’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, most under 100 feet, restricts their effectiveness in providing comprehensive cellular service.

The Town updated its cell tower ordinance in September 2025 to address cellular coverage gaps while maintaining the community’s Living with Nature philosophy. The revised regulations modernize communication tower standards to enhance public safety and quality of life, allowing increased tower heights up to 150 feet. Key provisions emphasize co-location opportunities and concealment requirements, balancing the need for improved cellular coverage with the Town’s environmental and aesthetic standards.

Central Communications Channel

The Town should consider establishing a Central Communications Channel to

coordinate all key island stakeholders, managed and operated by the Town’s Public Safety or Communications Department, with responsibility for overseeing the communication system, ensuring its effectiveness, and maintaining its operation.

The recommended system would include a dedicated emergency communications center within Town Hall, a multi-platform approach with mobile app, text alerts, email notifications, and a centralized website, regular training and drills for all stakeholders to ensure familiarity with the system, clear protocols for information dissemination during both routine and emergency situations, and 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 system while 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 system could prove critical to the swift response of dedicated personnel and the safety of the Kiawah’s population.

Under this framework, the Town would 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 Infrastructure

With the growth of electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) nationwide, the Town recognizes the importance of supporting sustainable transportation options for residents and visitors. The Town has installed three public EV charging stations behind Town Hall. Kiawah Island Golf Resort has also installed EV charging stations at the Sanctuary Hotel for resort guests.

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 land ownership. Beyond the Municipal Center, which serves administrative functions while providing 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 utilize the Municipal Center complex to enhance public offerings. This approach 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 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 Charleston County Government. Managed by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission, it provides an essential public access point to the beach.

KICA offers its members access to a network of amenities throughout the island. These amenities include the Sandcastle, three boat or kayak launch facilities, three observation towers, miles of leisure trails, and 26 beach access boardwalks. The Housing Market Study found KICA's amenities to be competitive with those of peer associations.

Kiawah Island Club operates several facilities available to club members, including two golf courses, The Beach Club, The Cape Club, the Marsh House, and Sasanqua Spa.

This tiered amenity structure differs from some competitor communities, such as Palmetto Bluff, where all owners have universal access to club amenities. For owners not part of the KIC, 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 five golf courses, 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 that defines Kiawah's character.

Community Gathering Space

Kiawah currently faces a significant gap in its community infrastructure: the absence of public facilities and gathering spaces. While Kiawah 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 amenities

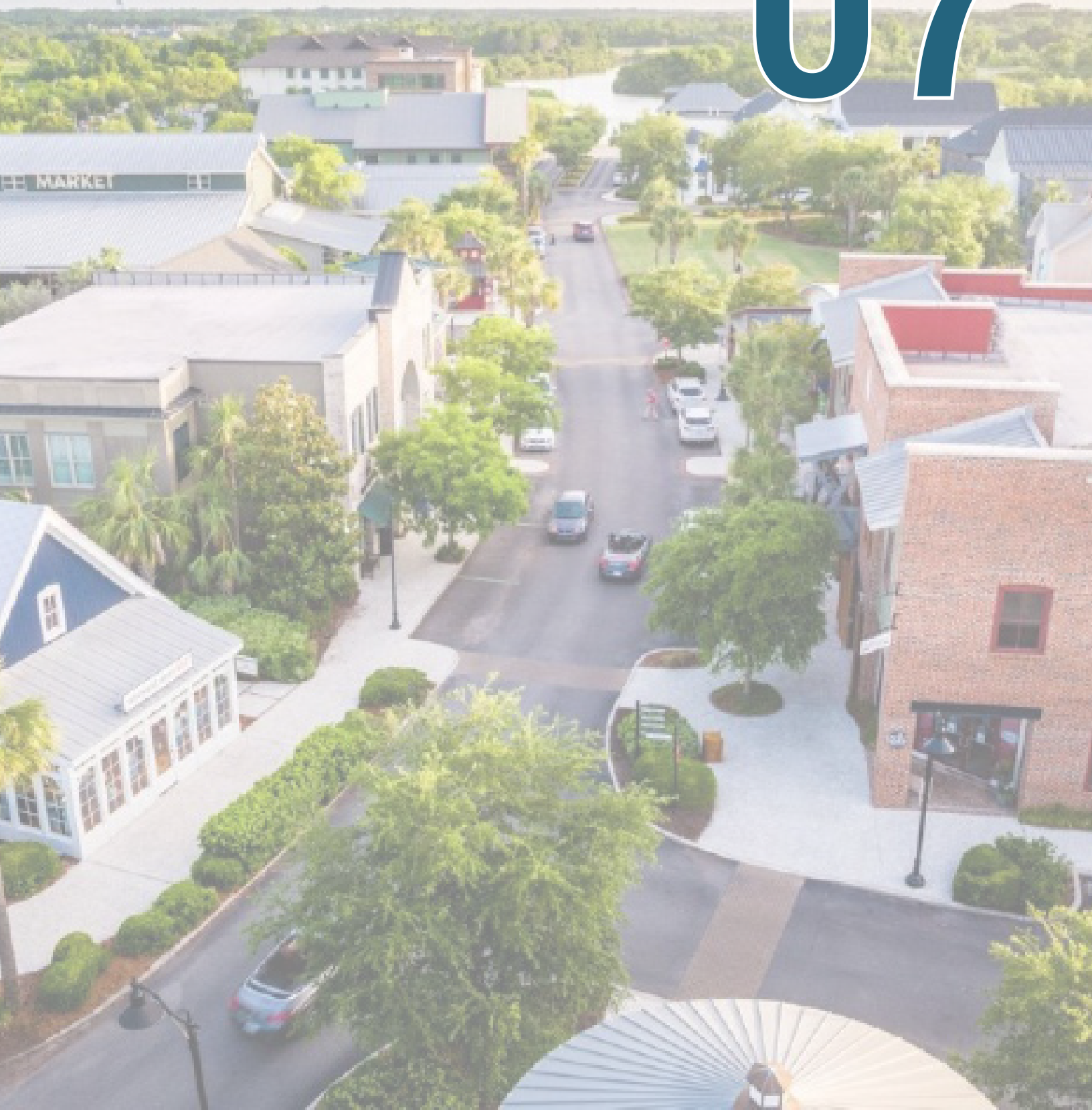
This access structure leaves Kiawah without accessible public spaces that are publicly accessible. The current arrangement creates several challenges for community cohesion and public engagement:

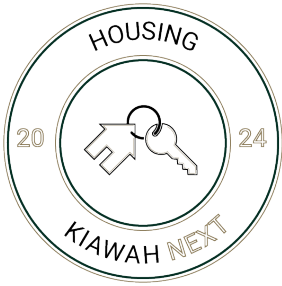
- Limited opportunities for inclusive community gatherings that bring together residents from different parts of Kiawah
- Restricted access for visitors hoping to experience Kiawah's cultural offerings and community spirit
- Reduced public programming options for Town-sponsored events and cultural initiatives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

A 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 by 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 and helping to build a more cohesive community identity that encompasses all who live, visit, and invest in Kiawah's future.

07





housingnext

Goal: Maintain Kiawah’s 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’s housing market reflects its function as both a residential community and resort destination. Kiawah’s existing 4087 housing units serve permanent residents, part-time property owners, and visitors, with approximately one-third of all residential units operating as short-term rentals and fewer than 30 percent of property owners claiming Kiawah as their primary residence

The real estate market demonstrates stability and strength, achieving record sales volumes of \$1.07 billion in 2024 while maintaining property values, with single-family homes averaging \$3 million and vacation rental rates growing 40 percent since 2019.

As Kiawah approaches full residential build-out, development patterns are shifting

from new construction to redevelopment and renovation of existing properties. This transition presents planning challenges, particularly for multi-family developments where shared ownership models can complicate reinvestment decisions. Additionally, the regional workforce housing shortage creates operational challenges, as many service industry workers cannot afford housing on or near the island, resulting in lengthy commutes that impact both workforce stability and business operations.

Housing Types

Kiawah's housing stock serves permanent and part-time residents as well as short-term renters. As of April 2025, Kiawah comprises 4,087 existing residential units with an additional 263 units currently under construction. The existing housing inventory includes two primary categories:

Single-family detached homes, representing 71 percent of existing residential units with 2,913 homes. Multi-family properties, primarily cottages and villas that typically offer condominium-style living, account for 29 percent of existing residential units with 1,174 units.

Future development potential includes 341 additional single-family homesites and 530 potential multi-family units across various planned developments. When combined with existing and under-construction units, Kiawah's total residential development entitlements exceeds 5,200 units, a 20 percent increase.

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. In April 2025, the Town reported 4,087 housing units on Kiawah, with approximately 1,400 units granted short-term rental business licenses. This represents 34 percent of Kiawah's total housing stock having the capacity to serve as short-term rental accommodations, underscoring the impact of

this sector on Kiawah's residential and tourism economy.

Short-term rentals present both opportunities and challenges for Kiawah. While they support a robust tourism economy, they may also impact community dynamics and service needs. This pattern contributes to fluctuations in Kiawah'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 Kiawah's housing stock.

Real Estate Market Overview

The Kiawah real estate market in 2024 demonstrated continued strength, with 447 property closings generating a total sales volume of \$1.07 billion. This represents the highest annual sales volume in Kiawah's documented real estate history, reflecting sustained demand for properties across all market segments.

Property values remained stable across most segments in 2024. Single-family homes maintained a median price of \$3 million,

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.

essentially unchanged from 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 a substantial shift in 2024, with median prices rising to \$1.45 million, up from \$710,000 in 2023. This increase is primarily attributable to sales from The Cape development, which introduced higher-priced villa properties and shifted the overall market profile for this property type.

The transaction volume in 2024, with 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, current transaction levels indicate sustained market activity and buyer interest. For historical context, Kiawah recorded 656 transactions in 2020 with a sales volume of \$807 million, 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 percent of total island inventory, continuing a pattern of limited supply that has characterized the market in recent years. Historical data show that available inventory has ranged from 1.3 to 3.1 percent of total island properties between 2020 and 2023.

Market data indicate 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 Kiawah properties. These trends have planning implications for infrastructure capacity, municipal services demand, and development pattern management.

Redevelopment: A Key Factor for Future Growth

As Kiawah 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 highlights several key factors that underscore the importance of redevelopment:

- 1. Aging Housing Stock:** Redevelopment and renovation are essential to maintaining the competitiveness and value of these properties.
- 2. Reinvestment Trends:** Residential renovation permits increased from 218 in 2019 to a peak of 581 in 2022, before declining to 286 in 2024.

Residential renovations:

- 2019: 218

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.

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

- 3. Challenges for Villas:** Reinvestment in multi-family properties is more difficult under shared ownership models, posing long-term challenges for maintaining property value as these properties 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, including exploring options to encourage reinvestment, particularly in shared ownership properties such as villas, and 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 while ensuring ong-term property value growth. This approach will attract new generations of buyers while preserving its unique natural environment and community character.

Workforce Housing

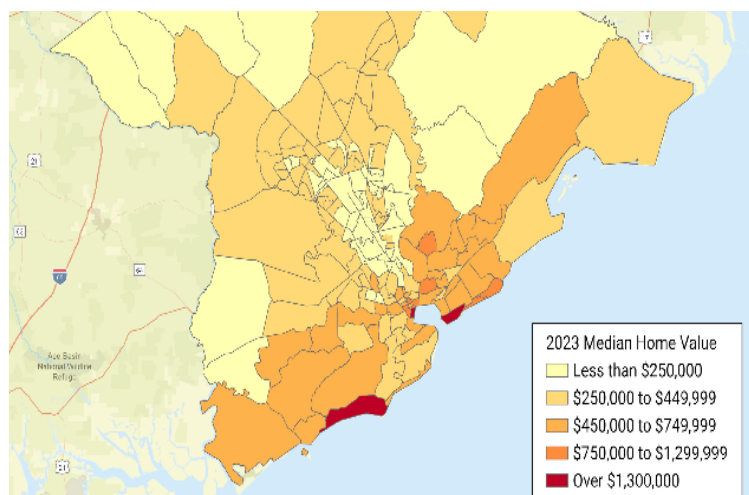
Workforce housing represents a regional challenge, with one of the key issues being the absence of workforce housing within Kiawah and limited options in the surrounding Johns Island area. This situation has led to significant commuting

challenges and associated issues for Kiawah’s workforce.

Census data reveal that nearly three-quarters of all workers on Kiawah travel more than 25 miles to reach their jobs. This substantial commute is driven in part by the scarcity of affordable housing options closer to Kiawah.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that many of these commuters, especially those in entry-level jobs in Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade, earn less than \$50,000 annually. Based on HUD guidelines, which consider households paying more than 30 percent 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 seek homes in more remote areas of the Charleston region, where median home values fit within their budgets. This situation affects workers’ quality of life through lengthy commutes while having broader implications for the region’s transportation patterns and economic dynamics.



Median Home Values, Charleston MSA, 2023

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

08





landusenext

Goal: Promote 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 Kiawah nears buildout, the Town must reevaluate its land use strategies to balance future development, conservation, and resilience.

This Land Use element outlines Kiawah's unique development conditions and necessary actions for continued prosperity. This element aims to guide policies that preserve Kiawah's character while meeting evolving community needs, ensuring environmental protection while maintaining quality of life for residents.

Kiawah's development status reflects significant progress toward full buildout, with 4,087 existing residential units and 263

additional units under construction. The remaining development capacity includes 341 single-family lots and 530 potential multifamily units, bringing total potential residential development to as many as **5,200** units. This approaching buildout condition requires strategic planning that prioritizes conservation of remaining natural areas while managing the transition from new development to redevelopment of existing properties.

Kiawah's Buildout Snapshot

Kiawah's buildout status provides an overview of the area's current residential landscape and future development projections. Currently, there are 4,087 residential units, predominantly single-family homes. There are 263 residential units under construction, with 341 future single family residential lots and potential

530 multifamily residential units.

When combined with current units, this brings the total potential number of developed residential units to as many as 5,200 units. The potential for further development in specific areas remains 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. Analysis include both historical and current land pattern and development assumptions.

Existing Residential Units	
Single Family	2913
Multifamily	1174
Total Residential Units	4087
Under Construction Residential Units	
Single Family	88
Multifamily (<i>Seafields, Ocean Pines</i>)	175
Total Residential Units	263
Future Single Family Residential	
Undeveloped Single Family Residential Lots	380
Conservation and Common Properties	-39
Single Family Residential Potential	341
Future Multifamily Residential	
¹ Kiawah Island Golf Resort - Residential	420
² Kiawah Partners (<i>Upper Beachwalker Parcels</i>)	72
³ Freshfields Village - Residential	38
Multifamily Residential Potential	530
Total Potential Residential Units	5221
Current Hotel Rooms	
The Sanctuary	255
Andell Inn	99
Total Hotel Rooms	354
Future Hotel Rooms	
¹ East Beach	150
West Beach	150
Total Potential Hotel Rooms	300
Total Potential Hotel Rooms	654

Notes: ¹ KIGR values may have tradeoffs between residential dwelling units and hotel rooms. Remaining undeveloped lands are likely to be developed as multifamily, however may include single family residential. ² Upper Beachwalker parcels include parcels 207050004, 2070500117,-116,-120. ³ Remaining FFV residential development is projected from the balance of up to 200 total residential units, which may only occur on select parcels remaining.

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 responsible for approving all applications for proposed annexations while evaluating all relevant factors to determine whether any annexation proposal benefits 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 forest is paramount to maintaining Kiawah’s vision.

Zoning and Land Use

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

While this plan does not define or impact the Town’s Zoning Ordinance, the ordinance helps enforce Land Use policies.

Zoning: A regulatory tool for managing present-day development by defining the current permissible uses of specific properties within a given jurisdiction.

Land Use: A regulatory tool for for managing future development, as defined in the Comprehensive Plan, to govern future uses of areas of properties.

Comprehensive Plan Land Use Categories and Zoning Districts

Land Use Categories	Zoning Districts
Low Density Residential	R-1, PR
Medium Density Residential	R-1, R-2, PR
High Density Residential	R-1, R-2, R-3, PR
Commercial	C, PR
Resort	RST-1, RST-2, PR
Community Support	CS, CS-2, PR
Active Recreation, 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 Zoning 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 and Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Commission and Town Council should ensure that their recommendations and approvals adhere to the Future Land Use recommendations outlined in this plan.

Active Recreation and Open Space:

This category is intended to promote the development of community parks and recreational facilities including parks, golf courses, and tennis courts. This category also provides for lands that are intended to remain in their natural state; this includes land that have been protected through conservation easements or that are publicly or privately owned. Some examples include the Tennis Center, Night Heron Park, and The Sandcastle.

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 permits higher-density residential development, with a maximum of 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 complements the community character.

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

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 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.

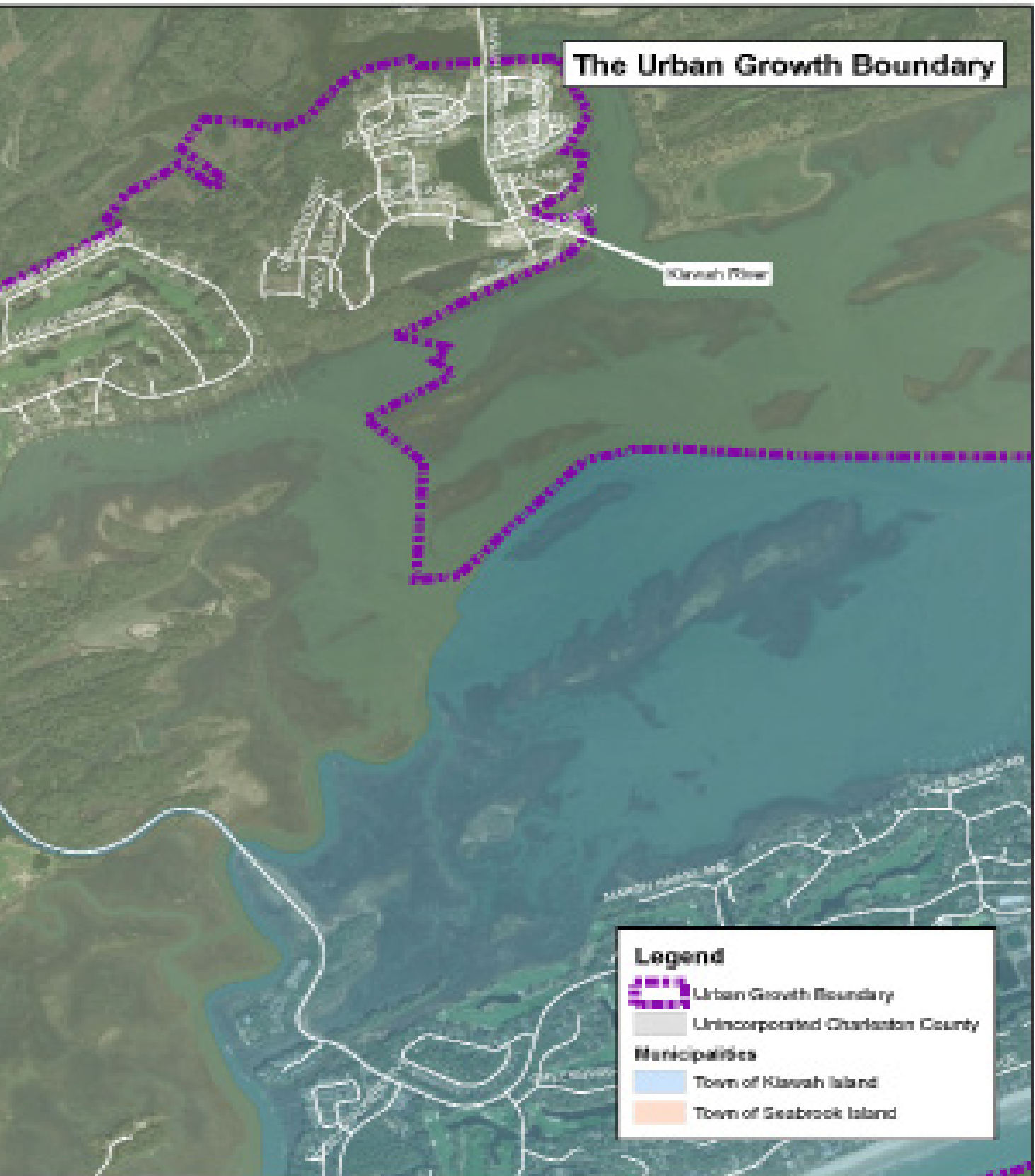
The UGB ensures that the approach to Kiawah Island along the Betsy Kerrison Parkway retains its low-density character. Effective management of the UGB requires active collaboration between Kiawah Island, Charleston County, and neighboring communities such as Seabrook Island. This cooperation is important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

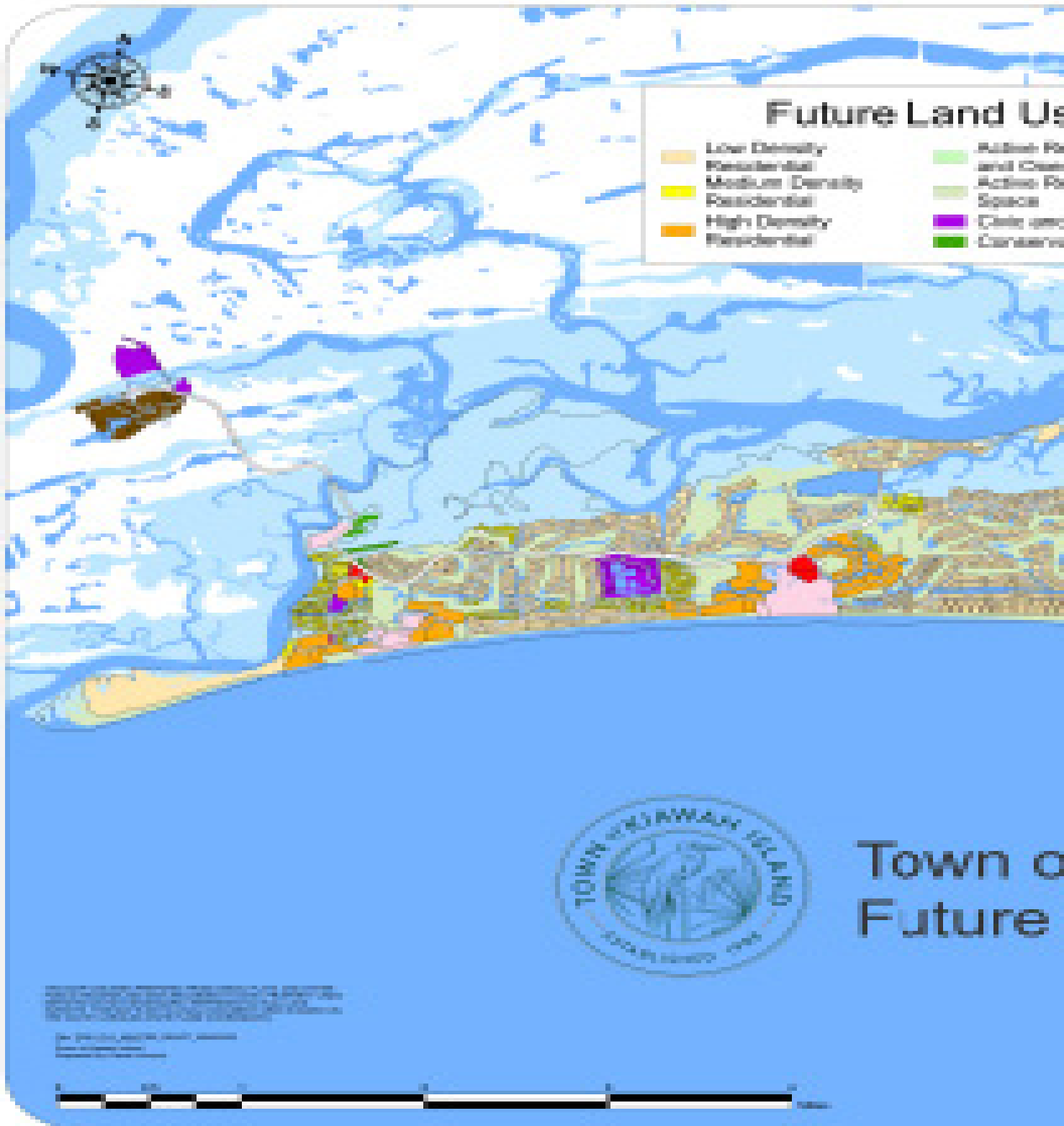
Looking to the future, it's important to consider how sea-level rise might impact the areas surrounding the UGB, potentially necessitating reassessment to ensure its continued effectiveness. Education and public engagement are key components in maintaining the UGB's integrity, with community outreach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







Future Map Legend

Future Land Use Map of Kiawah Island

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

Goal: Provide safe and effective 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 with a single road leading to the Town from Johns Island. Most roads are privately owned, primarily by KICA, while the Town maintains two public roads.

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 Kiawah 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 Kiawah'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 two 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 one mile long and 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, as explained later in this section.

Kiawah 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 assesses these roadways every two to five years to ensure proper maintenance.

The road network presents challenges, as only 16 percent 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 while 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 options. Kiawah's trail system is designed to provide beach access for both public and private users of the Kiawah area.

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 while connecting the public beach access at Beachwalker County Park to Kiawah's main entrance area and serving as an important link in 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 to create a seamless network spanning Kiawah.

The comprehensive trail network on Kiawah

serves as a vital component of Kiawah's infrastructure and support multiple strategic objectives. The network promotes alternative transportation methods, reducing vehicular traffic and associated environmental impacts while encouraging active lifestyles and outdoor recreation that contribute to the health and well-being of both residents and visitors.

Furthermore, the trails enhance connectivity across Kiawah by 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 while ensuring that it continues to meet the community's evolving needs and preserve Kiawah's natural beauty and ecological integrity.



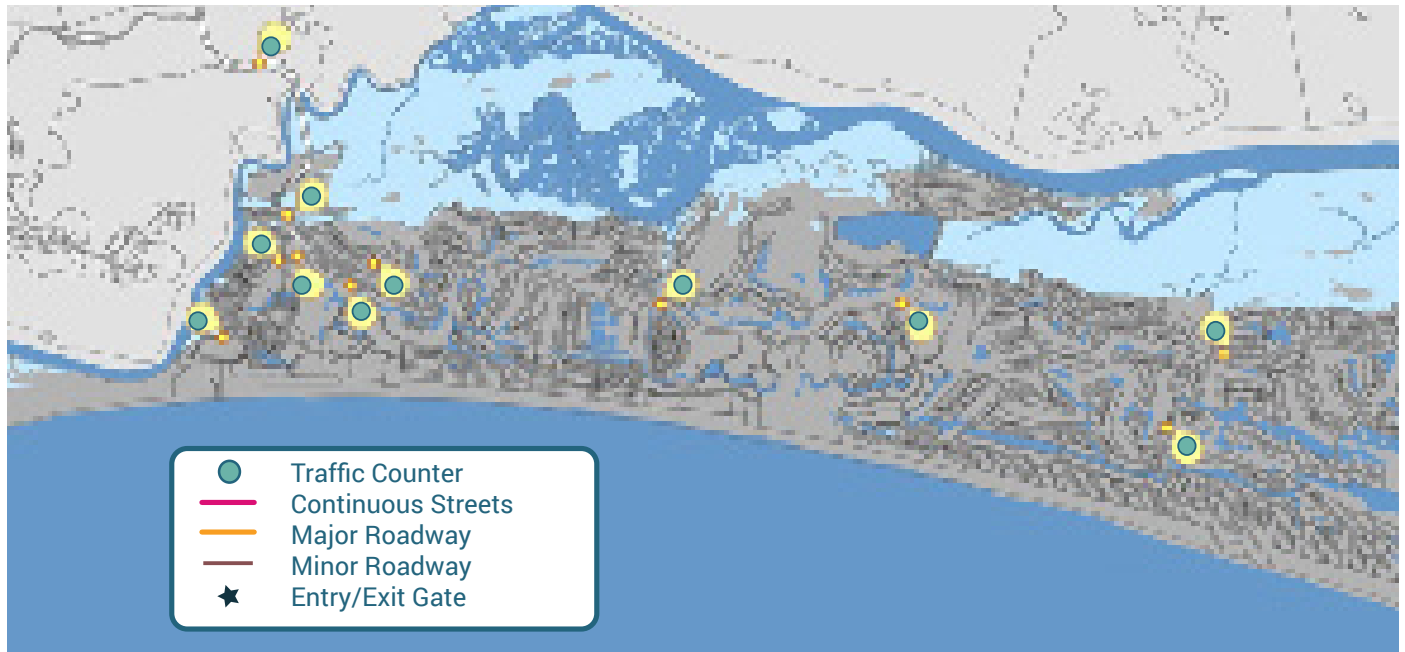


Greenspace Network: Parks, Trails & Open Space

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

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, with a primary focus on congestion at the Main Gate. Managed by KICA, the Main Gate has experienced fluctuations in vehicle traffic over the past four years. In 2024, 2.37M vehicles passed through, representing an increase from 2.3M in 2023, which had already shown growth from 2.1M in 2022. This upward trajectory follows a notable decline from the peak of 2.4M vehicles recorded in 2021.

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

These changes significantly reduced inbound traffic backups while virtually eliminating outbound congestion at the main gate.

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 evaluated 13 key intersections along Kiawah Island Parkway, Betsy Kerrison Parkway, and Seabrook Island Road while projecting conditions through 2036.

Key recommendations included:

- Kiawah Island Parkway at Real Estate Office: Converting to right-in/right-out access with a connection from Beachwalker Drive.
- Kiawah Island Parkway at Andell Development: Installing a traffic signal to better serve long-term conditions.
- Kiawah Island Parkway at Freshfields Drive: Creating an interconnection with

Andell West Development and converting it to right-in/right-out access.

For long-term improvements, the study recommended:

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

These recommendations were based on certain assumptions, some of which have not materialized. Some recommendations are beyond the Town's jurisdiction to implement. One recommendation was to install a traffic signal, which the Town Council and community did not support.

The recommendations were proposed to address current traffic needs while anticipating potential impacts from seven identified short-term development projects and three potential long-term development sites. The goal is to ensure the Town's roadway network can accommodate future growth while maintaining acceptable service levels.

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





Street Network

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

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 the addition of a stacking and right-turn lane into Beachwalker County Park as well as the expansion of portions of the bike path to eight feet in width. In 2025, the Town completed improvements to the upper part of the bike path.

In response to the Kimley-Horn study findings, the Town implemented strategic infrastructure modifications in 2024. At the intersection of Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway, the westbound through lane was converted to a free-flow lane while the westbound left-turn lane was channelized with stop sign control.

At the main gate entrance, a new landscape island was installed to enhance both aesthetics and traffic management. This area underwent restriping to create a merge lane and significantly improve traffic storage capacity. Although initial plans included adding a right-turn lane at this location, 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 that vehicles frequently exceeded the speed limit. Areas with overgrown vegetation obstructed visibility, affecting drivers' ability to see pedestrians and cyclists. The study also projected traffic volumes for 2026, taking into account potential developments and an assumed annual growth rate in traffic.

Based on the traffic study findings, Kimley-Horn explored various design alternatives to improve traffic flow and safety at the intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Kiawah Beach Drive. The study concluded that a roundabout would be the most effective solution for this location.

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, 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, as they serve as essential arteries for daily commutes. These routes serve workers and residents of all the Sea Islands, including Kiawah, Seabrook, Johns, and Wadmalaw Islands. Contractors, subcontractors, landscape and maintenance personnel, hospitality workers, and others rely on these routes for their transportation needs. Census data reveal 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 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 and 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 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 ensuring a safe and 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



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

along US 17 while minimizing impacts on planned water infrastructure. The project is scheduled for 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 present 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 analysis outlines a comprehensive approach to roads and land use integration while addressing current challenges and future needs, and preserving Kiawah's character. These strategies aim to optimize traffic flow while enhancing mobility options and aligning transportation infrastructure with sustainable land use practices to ensure Kiawah's long-term vitality and resilience.

1. **Kiawah's transportation infrastructure** is characterized by limited access points, which present unique challenges for traffic management. Kiawah is served by Kiawah Island Parkway, the main artery connecting Kiawah Island to Johns Island, while Beachwalker Drive branches off from the Parkway to provide sole access

to Kiawah's public beach. This limited road network creates a bottleneck effect, particularly during peak tourist seasons and during morning and afternoon periods when contractors are arriving or leaving Kiawah.

2. Traffic Flow Optimization

Addressing Kiawah's traffic congestion requires a multi-faceted approach. Implementing turbo or standard roundabouts at key intersections along Kiawah Island Parkway should be assessed. 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 backup at the intersection. Any redesign should consider not only vehicular traffic but also ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

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, additional 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 made by residents and visitors. The Town or a private entity could 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 and address 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 to better 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. Coordination with Seabrook Island on shared traffic management strategies can lead to more comprehensive solutions. Conduct regular

traffic studies to inform long-term planning and 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 in the event of emergencies. This approach would create additional evacuation routes and reduce main road congestion, while requiring minimal new infrastructure, as 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, with a focus on enhancing 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 lanes 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

Goal: 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 is to focus investment on priorities identified as critical to Kiawah's resilience. This section discusses the purpose of developing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to coordinate the prioritization, planning, and budgeting of these investments over ten years. The approach emphasizes resilience through emergency management, hazard mitigation, natural resource protection, and infrastructure maintenance while highlighting the importance of 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 while prioritizing critical and at-risk infrastructure. New content should include a comprehensive assessment of potential funding sources, from local accommodations taxes to federal grants, while outlining key projects such as road elevations, beach restoration, stormwater management improvements, and the potential installation of a Town-owned cell tower to address cellular service on Kiawah.

Beyond infrastructure and resiliency, priority investments may emerge from future initiatives that 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 allocation of financial resources necessary to prioritize investments. The plan will cover ten years while allowing for the following benefits:

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

The Town Council will update the CIP annually during the budget process by evaluating projected fund balances against ten-year funding requirements for each priority. Following adoption, the Council will review progress yearly and adjust the plan based on current needs and recommendations.

As such, the CIP will be a dynamic document that charts the planning and funding for major capital projects or priorities within the community. Town Council should receive quarterly financial reports for the plan and discuss these

findings in an 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 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025.

Local Funding:

As of the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, the Town's financial position for capital improvements and emergency preparedness was as follows:

- **Capital Fund Balance: \$7,549,174**
This fund is committed to future capital projects, allowing the Town to plan and execute significant infrastructure improvements and community enhancements.
- **Emergency Fund Balance: \$3,354,660**
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.

PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

These dedicated funds, totaling \$10,903,834, reflect the Town's strategic approach to financial management while 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 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 while 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 while continually refining its CIP process, the Town should implement a robust 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 toward 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 five years. The report will cover strategies and investments related to maintaining the following areas:

Emergency Management:

As a coastal community on barrier islands, the Town acknowledges the critical importance of emergency management and infrastructure. The risk of severe hurricanes and tidal flooding, along with Kiawah's remote location, makes these threats significant concerns for the community.

To prioritize funding for emergency management, the Town will conduct reasonable assessments of its infrastructure and identify the replacement costs associated with it. Next, the Town will estimate the cleanup or recovery expenses related to restoring Kiawah to its pre-emergency condition. Lastly, the costs associated with the resources required 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 ranking, resulting in lower insurance costs for residents. The Town annually updates its Hazard Mitigation Action Plan while focusing primarily on flooding while recognizing the need to address other hazards such as hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, explosions, and erosion.

Integrated into the Town’s Priority Investment element, hazard mitigation planning is crucial for identifying, prioritizing, and protecting critical community assets and infrastructure. This integration enables the Town to plan, budget, and justify improvements that effectively mitigate various hazards while relying on regular reviews and collaborative efforts among Kiawah entities for success.

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

Natural Resources:

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

Accommodations Tax:

Reserves have been maintained for beach preservation. A \$3.6 million major restoration was completed in 2006, while the Town spent \$115,000 monitoring the impacts on the beach and wildlife through 2014. Severe erosion was identified in 2014 to 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 continues to monitor erosion and accretion rates as well as shoreline changes while collaborating with KIGR on another east end channel renourishment.

The permitting process began in 2025, with a potential project commencing in 2027 or 2028. Coastal Science and Engineering conducts observations included in the state-mandated Beach Management Plan, and 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 while integrating various management tools and strategies. It is designed as a living document that will be reviewed every five years to maintain its relevance and effectiveness.

The plan outlines proposals for restoring and protecting the wetlands on Kiawah while specifically targeting areas with marsh loss and erosion. 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 while suggesting regulatory actions to protect the marsh, emphasizing public education and outreach, and outlining various restoration techniques, including 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 highlights the numerous benefits of healthy marshes, including mitigating the effects of erosion and flooding, enhancing water quality, providing vital habitats for wildlife, and serving as nurseries for marine life. By implementing this comprehensive approach, Kiawah aims to ensure the long-term health and resilience of its valuable marsh ecosystems.

Other Infrastructure:

As a priority investment, the Town’s roads and bridge should be assigned useful lives and maintenance schedules tied to these useful lives. Maintenance should include establishing a baseline or current condition of the roadway, bridge, curb cuts, and associated bike paths while budget funding should be linked to coincide with the replacement schedules.

South Carolina Water Utilities, parent company to Kiawah Island Utility Company, owns and operates the water and wastewater services to Kiawah Island, where the original water lines servicing the island require regular maintenance. Seabrook Island Utility Commission provides services not only within Seabrook Island but also to Freshfields and undeveloped lands surrounding Freshfields, with a need for the Commission to also service the Municipal Complex.

As a priority investment, the Town will seek to work with Kiawah Island Utility 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 it is adequate and resilient enough to meet the

future needs of Kiawah as the community continues to grow while this effort would serve as a joint public-private partnership to promote the health and welfare of 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 while being systematically scheduled for maintenance based on their projected useful lives. Additionally, the Town will evaluate and grade the quality of its three miles of roads to inform future maintenance needs. The Kiawah Island Community Association owns and maintains more than 40 miles of underground pipes that provide drainage for the island while conducting proactive maintenance or replacement to ensure that these pipes are in working order and do not compromise the overall functionality of the stormwater network managed by KICA.

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

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resiliencynext

Goal: 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’s coastal location brings both natural beauty and environmental vulnerabilities. Sea-level rise, increased flooding, and shoreline erosion threaten the community’s infrastructure, natural resources, and quality of life.

This section outlines the Town’s comprehensive resilience strategy, integrating environmental stewardship, infrastructure improvements, emergency preparedness, and stakeholder coordination to protect both current residents and future generations.

Key initiatives include marsh management, stormwater systems, beach sustainability, public safety coordination, emergency operations, and evacuation planning. The

approach recognizes that healthy natural systems, particularly marshes and beaches, provide critical protection against severe weather events while also supporting essential habitat and the community’s coastal character.

Resiliency

The Town's resilience strategy operates on two parallel tracks: protecting and enhancing natural systems while strengthening built infrastructure and emergency response capabilities.

Environmental initiatives form the foundation of this approach. The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan employs a four-pronged strategy to monitor, protect, engage, and restore marsh ecosystems that buffer the island from storm surge and flooding. Advanced stormwater management ordinances incorporate Low Impact Development practices to reduce runoff and improve water quality. Beach sustainability programs leverage natural coastal processes, while the Town maintains real-time flood monitoring systems and conducts ongoing water quality testing. Looking forward, the Town is exploring nature-based solutions such as living shorelines, soft engineering approaches that have proven successful in similar 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 while addressing concerns such as bank erosion and vegetation changes.

Additionally, the Town may explore implementing nature-based solutions, such as living shoreline techniques utilized successfully in communities such as Folly

Beach and Boyd, which involve oyster castles, bagged shell reefs, and manufactured wire reefs. These examples illustrate methods to naturally stabilize shorelines while fostering sediment accretion and enhancing marsh regeneration and marine habitat.

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 while using pervious paving materials, vegetative buffers, and other green infrastructure methods inspired by Low Impact Development 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.

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 to preserve marsh functions, such as sediment accretion and runoff filtration. Additionally, the Town may consider strategies such as wattle fences and wood breakwaters, techniques successfully utilized in regional projects such as those at Boyd and Folly Beach, as potential approaches to further enhance sediment retention and promote native vegetation growth.

Beach Sustainability and Shoreline Restoration

The Town prioritizes the preservation and

sustainability of its beaches, which are essential for maintaining ecological health while promoting recreation and supporting 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, such as vegetated dunes and controlled access pathways, will be implemented to minimize erosion while protecting habitats and enhancing the shoreline’s overall health.

In addition to modified zoning standards, 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. The Town may establish outreach programs, including ambassador initiatives similar to those in other coastal resilience projects like the Boyd Living Shoreline. These initiatives have empowered residents to engage in resilience planning while increasing environmental literacy and supporting 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 dedicated to helpful information such as podcasts, training materials, contact lists, and other

resiliency-related resources.

Additionally, the Town may hold periodic community outreach and training sessions to raise awareness of emergency resources, such as CERT, evacuation routes, and storm shelters while complementing these sessions with brochures and other materials for visitors to use.

Kiawah Go Green

The Town actively supports environmental sustainability through various Go Green initiatives while focusing on reducing environmental impacts and promoting sustainable practices. Current key efforts include installing additional electric vehicle charging stations at Town Hall and encouraging broader electric vehicle adoption across the island. Further exploration into renewable energy sources, partnerships to advance green energy use, and pursuit of 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 Town Council on resilience and sustainability issues while guiding the implementation of recommended strategies from the Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, the 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

will continuously adapt, effectively managing resilience initiatives and sustaining the island's environmental health and community well-being for current and future generations.

Housing and Land Use

The Town should 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.

The Town should review and update zoning standards to account for environmental changes and trends particularly along the ocean and marsh front, which are most vulnerable to sea-level rise.

Infrastructure

Existing community facilities, including utilities, first responders, CERT, and Town buildings, should be evaluated based on both current 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 maintains an Emergency Preparedness Plan that is reviewed and updated annually. Its goal is to keep residents and organizations on Kiawah informed about conditions that could pose a threat to safety or property and ensure that all directives and advice from national, state, or local authorities are effectively communicated to everyone.

To support recovery after natural disasters,

the Town has a debris removal contract that covers cleanup of debris resulting from hurricanes or severe weather. This contract also includes damage assessments, debris reduction, barge transport, temporary housing, satellite phone service, and meal provisions in the event of a post-disaster scenario.

The Town uses a telephone notification system called CodeRED to alert residents during emergencies or urgent community issues, such as evacuation orders, boil-water advisories, tornado warnings, and flash floods. This system allows the Town to send status updates while requesting resources and issuing public notices to the county, fire, law enforcement, medical personnel, and media from a remote location during evacuations.

As discussed in the Community Facilities element, establishing an island-wide communications channel. This channel would centralize all outreach while including the emergency and community alerts mentioned above.

Public Safety Committee

The Town's Public Safety Committee serves as the primary liaison while gathering all public safety organizations monthly to discuss relevant issues. It meets the Town's legal requirements under state law concerning the health, safety, and welfare of residents, as outlined in Title 5 of the South Carolina Code of Laws.

Acting as the central hub for safety initiatives, the committee works with partners such as the St. Johns Fire District, Charleston County Emergency Medical Services, KICA security, KIGR Security, Town Code Enforcement, Barrier Island Ocean

Rescue, and the Charleston County Sheriff's Office. These collaborations ensure thorough safety coverage across Kiawah.

The committee should consider developing a unified Public Safety and Resilience Strategy in collaboration with island stakeholders. This plan would evaluate Kiawah's risks while assessing utility resilience in various scenarios and reviewing existing capabilities of first responders. It would also define organizational roles during emergencies while including regular testing of response systems.

As coastal communities face increasing threats from rising sea levels and extreme weather events, the committee will focus on enhancing emergency preparedness and response. By adopting best practices from similar communities while maintaining proactive safety measures, the Town aims to develop a resilient community that effectively safeguards residents, property owners, and visitors.

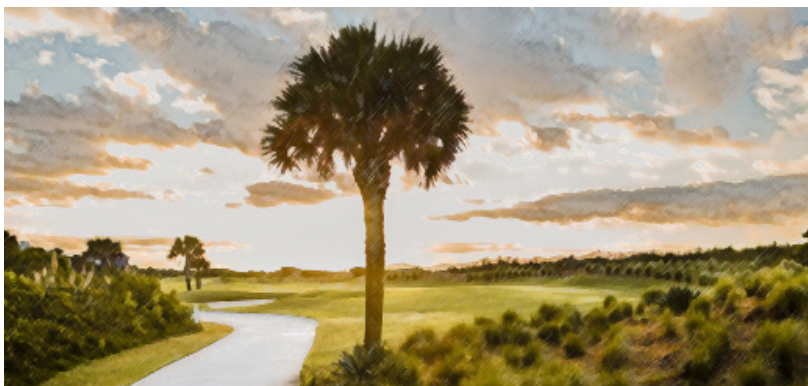
Flooding

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 while outlining mitigation strategies.

The Flood Mitigation and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Subcommittee emphasizes the importance of maintaining a robust stormwater management system. The subcommittee notes 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 nor'easter

in December 2023 underscored these vulnerabilities by causing severe flooding that affected critical infrastructure and roads.





TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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