

TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

# kiawahnext

Revisions as of 8-01-2025

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025

# Table of Contents

---

## *part one: vision & overview*

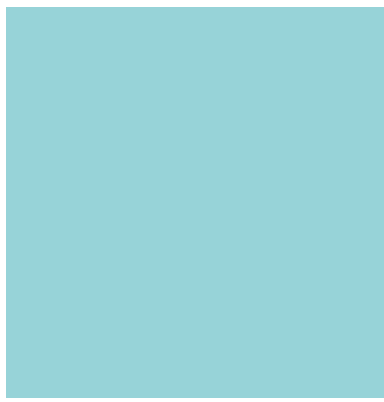
- 09 **glossy of terms**
- 10 **executive summary**
- 14 **kiawah by the numbers**

## *part two: strategic priorities for kiawah's future*

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

## *part three: appendix*

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



TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

# kiawahnext

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025



# Acknowledgements

---

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

## TOWN COUNCIL

Mayor Bradley D. Belt

Mayor Pro Tempore Russell Berner

Council Member E. Luke Farrell

Council Member Madeleine Kaye

Council Member Lance Spencer

## TOWN STAFF

Stephanie Tillerson, AICP, Town Administrator

John Taylor, Jr., Planning Director

Jim Jordan

Brian Gottshalk

Patrea St. John

Bruce Spicher

Dorota Szubert

Daniel Vincent

## PLANNING COMMISSION

Joanne K. Hennessy, Chair

Larry Iwan, Vice-Chair

Eugene A. Babinec

John Connolly

Sandra L. Devine

Robert Ryan

Mary E. Schmersal

## WITH CONTRIBUTION FROM FORMER PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Andrew J. Capelli

Ronald Curran, MD

William Dowdy

E. Luke Farrell

Madeleine Kaye



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



**01** section

**part one:** vision

**01 vision**

**02 blueprint**

**03 comprehensive plan elements**

# kiawahnext

## part I: snapshot

# Glossary of Terms

---

## **Kiawah Governance Entities and Major Stakeholders**

**Kiawah 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<sup>next</sup>

**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 among 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 maximum 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. Over the coming decade, 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 build-out completion, with rResidential units are projected to grow from 4,087 completed units to between 4,800 and 5,221 total units over the next decade, representing a 17 to 28 percent increase. The final number depends on development decisions regarding the optimal mix of residential units and hotel accommodations within planned resort expansions. While the full-time residential population is projected to grow modestly, expansion of multi-family properties will drive increased growth in visitor and seasonal resident populations. This strategic priority focuses on managing remaining development capacity, preparing for the transition from new construction to property redevelopment, and establishing formal coordination mechanisms among key stakeholder.
2. Community Experience focuses on maintaining 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 ensures that physical systems 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<sub>next</sub>

---

## **KiawahNext Implementation Framework**

This section presents the highest-priority actions from the four strategic focus areas, establishing a clear implementation framework to achieve Kiawah’s planning objectives through 2035. 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** - Actively support tourism development that aligns with the Kiawah brand and experience, including a possible expanded focus on ecotourism.
- 2.3. 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 utilities** - Review performance and recovery plans under normal and emergency situations.
- 3.3. Evaluate strategies to adapt existing facilities to support growth, as well as the deployment of new models such as**

**EV technologies** - 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. This officer would collaborate with other resilience personnel and key stakeholders, including the Kiawah Conservancy, KICA, and potentially the Town of Seabrook Island and the Seabrook Island Property Owners Association, to ensure comprehensive and coordinated resilience planning.

**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

## Top Trends Affecting Kiawah’s Next Ten Years

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

### Kiawah Key Facts

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

### Population Trends with Impact on Kiawah Roads, Infrastructure and Amenities

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

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

**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 with Impacts on Kiawah Resources - Expected

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

Type	Key Drivers	Exp. Impact
<b>Single Family:</b> ~3,242 Units*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~3,001 current/under construction SFR units</li> <li>• 341 undeveloped lots (2025)</li> <li>• Expected shift to redevelopment</li> </ul>	
<b>Multifamily</b> ~1,879 Units**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~ 1,349 current/under construction units</li> <li>• ~400-500 potential new units^</li> </ul>	
<b>Hotel</b> up to ~650 units**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 350 current rooms</li> <li>• ~ 150-300 potential new hotel rooms</li> </ul>	

### Total projected residential dwelling units excluding hotels: 5,262 (+ ~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 is expected, with impact on Kiawah resources

### Commercial / Resort Development – Within Kiawah

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

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

### Employment Snapshot

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

Employers	# of Employees
Kiawah Island Golf Resort	~1,700
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
<b>Planned Andell West</b> (Harris Teeter): likely to draw residents from lower Johns Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 160,000 sqft</li> </ul>
<b>Kiawah River:</b> Entitled to ~1,200 homes; Dunlin Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 1,200 homes</li> <li>72 guest rooms</li> </ul>
<b>Orange Hill:</b> Access to Kiawah Island Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Golf course</li> <li>128 homes, 68 cottages</li> </ul>
<b>Johns Island Junction:</b> Mixed use development at intersection of Betsy Kerrison, River, Bohicket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 128,300 sqft commercial</li> <li>Up to 101 DUs</li> </ul>
<b>Kiawah River Estates / Oak Point:</b> Expansion of golf facilities and residential with access to Kiawah via Governors Club (KIGR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[TBD]</li> </ul>

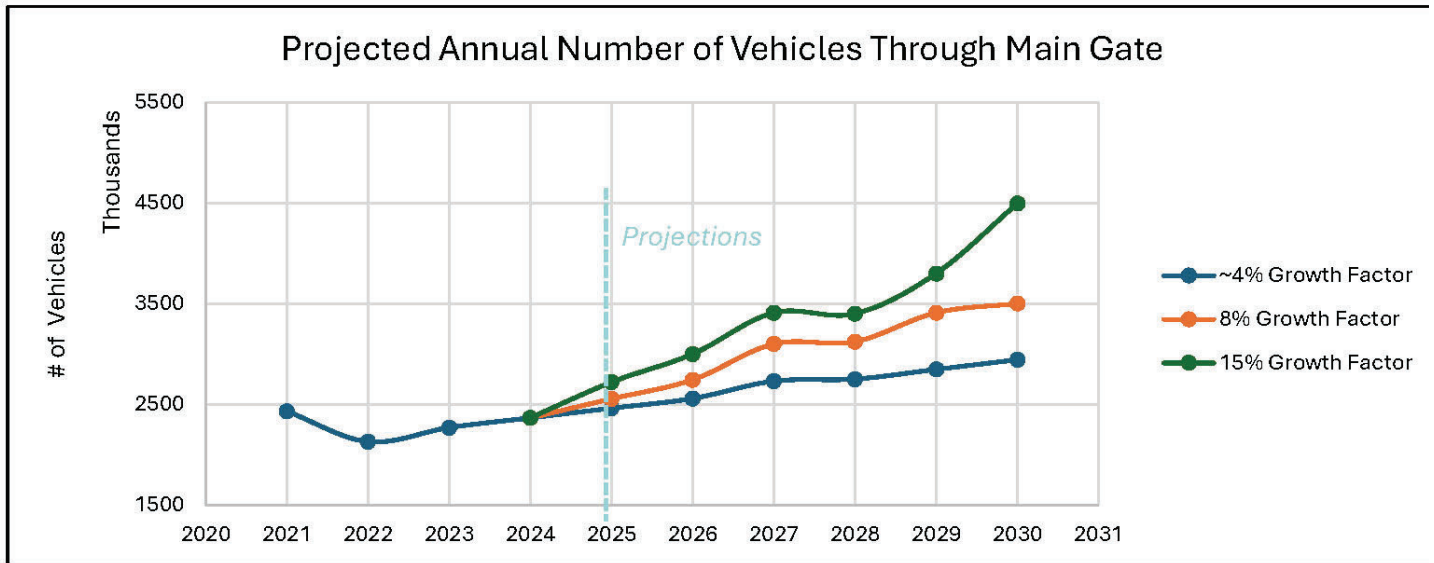
### Tourism / Visitor Snapshot

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

Tourism Factors	Trends
Short Term Rentals	1,374 licenses (~1/3 of dwelling units) (2025)
Non-resident stay visitors	~ 300,000 est. annual
Occupancy Rates (Vacation Rentals)	On average ~62%; 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)

## Top Trends Affecting Kiawah’s Next Ten Years

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



“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, the plan has modeled potential vehicle growth between 8% - 15%. Projections do not illustrate the extreme seasonality of traffic during peak seasons.”

### Expected Growth in Vehicle Traffic

Traffic Indicator	Scale	Exp. Impact
<b>Main Gate</b> Managed by KICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase ~4% increase from 2023 (2.27M) – 2024 (2.37M)</li> <li>By 2030 projected ~3.5 - 4 million vehicles</li> </ul>	
<b>Employees &amp; Service Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~758 unique business licenses projected + 3,000 employees contributes to ~16,300+ annual commercial passes</li> </ul>	
<b>Annual Gate Passes:</b> KICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~49,000+ issued day passes</li> <li>~14,000 Owner /Guest passes</li> </ul>	
<b>Recurring Gate Access</b> Property owners beyond Kiawah with club memberships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing number of new developments added impact to infrastructure, community facilities and amenities (Orange Hill, Kiawah River Estates, etc.)</li> </ul>	
<b>Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic</b> Traffic volumes are consistently higher during the summer months, reflecting peak tourist and part-time resident activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~7,300 vehicles per day on the KIP during June and July (2024); ~7,900 vehicles peak volume</li> <li>Weekends see consistently elevated traffic—particularly on Saturdays, which tend to show the highest single-day volumes, especially during mid-day hours.</li> </ul>	
<b>Beachwalker County Park</b> Beachwalker Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~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.</li> </ul>	
<b>Betsy Kerrison Parkway</b> SCDOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~8,700 Average Annual Daily Traffic (2024) Up ~10% from 2022 (7,800). Great percentage is estimated to route towards Kiawah.</li> </ul>	

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

# kiawahnext

## part II: blueprint

# Strategic Priorities for Kiawah's Future<sup>next</sup>

The KiawahNext Plan establishes four interconnected priorities that form the foundation for Kiawah's future evolution. These four strategic priorities address the essential requirements for sustaining Kiawah as a premier residential community and destination while preserving the island's distinctive natural character.

Each priority represents a distinct planning component that requires coordination with the other strategic areas to achieve comprehensive community objectives.

1. **Development and Growth** focuses on strategically managing Kiawah's remaining development capacity as the community nears complete residential build-out and anticipates continued development in remaining commercial areas.
2. **Community Experience** focuses on maintaining the robust economy and exceptional 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 resilience—will guide all planning and decisions over the next decade.

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

### Development of Remaining Residential and Commercial Sites:

**Growth in new residential developments:** Over the next decade, residential units are projected to grow from 4,087 completed units to between 4,800 and 5,221 total units, representing a 17 to 28 percent increase primarily driven by multi-family development.

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

**Residential Character and Visitor Activity:**

Kiawah’s housing patterns reveal a community fundamentally oriented toward visitors and seasonal residents rather than permanent occupancy. According to 2024 KICA membership data, 29 percent of property owners identify Kiawah as their primary residence. Approximately one-third of residential units operate as short-term rentals, indicating that roughly two-thirds of housing stock serves non-permanent residents and visitors.

While short-term rental licenses have remained relatively stable over the past five years, fluctuating between 1,312 and 1,356 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. This trend suggests that although the number of rental units isn’t expanding, each unit is generating more activity and longer occupancy periods.

These utilization patterns create unique planning challenges for Kiawah. Rather than experiencing traditional seasonal peaks followed by quiet periods, the island 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 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 and positively the overall economic climate. 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. Riverstone, parent company of Kiawah Island Golf Resort, owns significant undeveloped property on the island and adjacent to Freshfields Village, positioning the resort as a key participant in Kiawah’s future development decisions.

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

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

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

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

**Fiscal Strength and Stability:** The Town maintains a strong financial position, with FY26 budgeted revenues of \$17.6 million derived primarily from tourism-related taxes, business licenses, development permits, and municipal fees.

Through conservative fiscal management, the Town has accumulated reserve funds totaling \$46 million as of FY2025, providing financial capacity for resilience investments, emergency response, and infrastructure improvements.

The Town does not impose a property tax. Charleston County receives revenue through real estate taxes from Kiawah property owners, totaling \$96 million in FY2024, which directly supports local fire services, schools, county parks, and Charleston County administrative functions. Due to Kiawah’s unique population characteristics, Kiawah does not have schools, and there are no plans to build them.

**Key Relationships:** Kiawah’s continued development success relies on effective coordination among several key stakeholders with distinct but interconnected roles. The Town provides municipal services, including public safety, planning and zoning, and beach

management, while KICA manages gate access, infrastructure, ponds, common areas, and property owner amenities. KIGR and KP, as well as EDENS at Freshfields, represent additional stakeholders whose operations intersect with both municipal and community association functions. This multi-entity governance and stakeholder structure requires ongoing communication and strategic alignment to balance municipal priorities, property owner interests, resort operations, and commercial development objectives as these relationships continue to evolve.

### **Recommended Actions:**

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

#### **1.1. Establish the Kiawah Island Alliance:**

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.

needed investments supporting current and future growth within Johns Island and the Town.

## **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. Enhance Kiawah Advocacy:** This Comprehensive Plan identifies multiple issues and dependencies related to improvements to roads and infrastructure 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

## 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 seeking a coastal community experience. With a single access road serving the growing community, maintaining the balance between Kiawah's natural beauty and necessary development is essential for Kiawah's future. This balance requires ongoing collaboration among residents, businesses, visitors, and local government throughout the next decade.

### Understanding Our Community:

**Kiawah's Audience:** With 4,087 existing residential dwellings and 354 hotel rooms available today, a projected 1,000-plus dwellings and approximately 300 hotel rooms are expected to be built in the next ten years. Kiawah's community encompasses three primary population segments with distinct but often overlapping characteristics:

**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 1,368 short-term rental units. This visitor volume, concentrated during peak periods, creates significant strain on Kiawah's single access road and public facilities. Accurate visitor tracking remains challenging because no single entity monitors comprehensive numbers across all stakeholder.

### Residents:

- **Full-time Residents:** Kiawah is home to over 2,000 full-time residents, with an annual growth rate of 2.4 percent.
- **Part-Time Residents:** Approximately 7,000 part-time residents own property on Kiawah. While their usage patterns historically resembled those of short-term visitors, recent trends indicate part-time residents are spending more days on Kiawah and utilizing amenities more frequently.

### Preserving Community Experience:

Kiawah's community includes a varied mix of residents and over 300,000 annual visitors. 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 and 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, conducted from February to July 2023, cite traffic flow and congestion as either a weakness or a significant weakness.

**Natural Resources:** Much of Kiawah's allure stems from its natural beauty, including ten miles of beach, maritime forest, ponds, tidal streams, and river frontage. The Town 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 Kiawah Island Golf Resort 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 most closures being replaced by new establishments. 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 has been delayed until 2029 and will be anchored by a large grocery store. While additional restaurants or retail establishments may be included in the initial phase, these components remain uncertain. This development timeline perpetuates existing capacity limitations during peak visitor periods.

**Amenities:** KIGR, KP, and KICA provide many of the Kiawah's outdoor and active amenities, including golf, court sports, access to docks for boating, and pools. KIGR is redeveloping its court sports facility at the Roy Barth Tennis Center with the addition of a bar and casual dining area. The need for additional and updated amenities

will continue. However, stakeholders are addressing this issue.

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

## **Recommended Actions:**

### **2.1. Implement Proactive Traffic Management Strategies to Enhance Community Experience:**

Establish coordinated 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. Furthermore, 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** to evaluate:

- 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 ecotourism opportunities to position Kiawah as a world-class, recognized 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.
- Additionally, the commission would focus on meeting the needs of residents and visitors by concentrating on peak periods and offering suitable access options to help manage traffic more efficiently when entering Kiawah.

**2.3. Public Amenities Strategy:** Complete the civic and cultural center addition to Town Hall, then 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 the island while better understanding how end-stage development will impact the increasingly concentrated habitats and movement patterns of wildlife.
- The Town should incorporate necessary native vegetation and buffers while considering targeted conservation areas and identifying and prioritizing environmentally sensitive lands on and off Kiawah for conservation. This effort requires continued collaboration with Kiawah 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 may potentially 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 should conduct comprehensive evaluation of transportation infrastructure under normal and emergency conditions to ensure reliable access for residents and visitors. This assessment should prioritize roadway capacity for stormwater management during major storms, building upon KICA’s Adaptive Management Plan Task Force work to identify flood-prone areas and environmental vulnerabilities. The evaluation should include alternative emergency uses of the existing leisure trail network and assess expanding trail connectivity to Betsy Kerrison Parkway, which would provide Johns Island access and potential traffic congestion relief.

**3.2. Utility Infrastructure Assessment.**

Evaluate the capacity, resilience,

and lifespan of all utility systems 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 while working with stakeholders to strategically locate EV charging infrastructure. These adaptive approaches will ensure continued community accessibility and safety despite existing physical constraints.

## 4. Resiliency

**Vision:** Fostering and proactively continuing Kiawah’s 50-year commitment to design and development in harmony with nature requires prioritizing resilience in the face of development growth and environmental change. The focus on resilience needs to foster community adaptation while protecting Kiawah’s long-term health, safety, essential services, 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 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 the need for a Chief Resiliency Officer role and function** to bring all resiliency committees and reporting departments under one office to coordinate resilience-related efforts.

**The Resiliency Committee to determine the need for a consolidated Resiliency Plan.** This position would work with the Resiliency Committee to determine the need for a consolidated Resilience Plan for the Town that addresses all aspects of resilience, including development, housing, infrastructure, and emergency management, while incorporating current and updated 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.

**4.2. 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.

**4.3. 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**

# kiawahnext

## part III: elements

## ***What Is A Comprehensive Plan?***

The Town of Kiawah Island adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1994. South Carolina State Law § 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 State Law § 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.

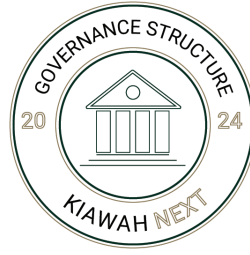
**Transportation:** Considers transportation facilities, including major road improvements, new road construction, transit projects, pedestrian and bicycle projects, and other elements of a transportation network.

**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.

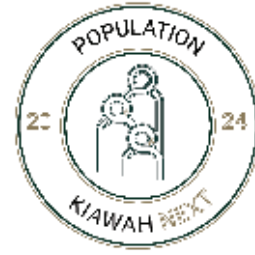
**Resiliency:** Considers the impacts of flooding, high water, and natural hazards on individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, economic development, public infrastructure and facilities, and public health, safety, and welfare.

PROCESS

KiawahNext adapts the required elements to Kiawah's Vision:



*Display and communicate the processes of unique Town and governance.*



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



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



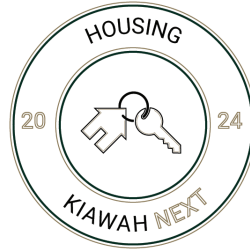
*Preserve Kiawah's greatest natural assets and habitat.*



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

# processnext

---

*The KiawahNext Comprehensive Plan 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 results of these surveys are shown on the subsequent pages.

**#2,832**

Unique Visitors  
to Website

**140.7 %**

Unique Visitors as a  
Percentage of Kiawah’s  
2020 census population

**# 3,567**

Total Website  
Views To-Date

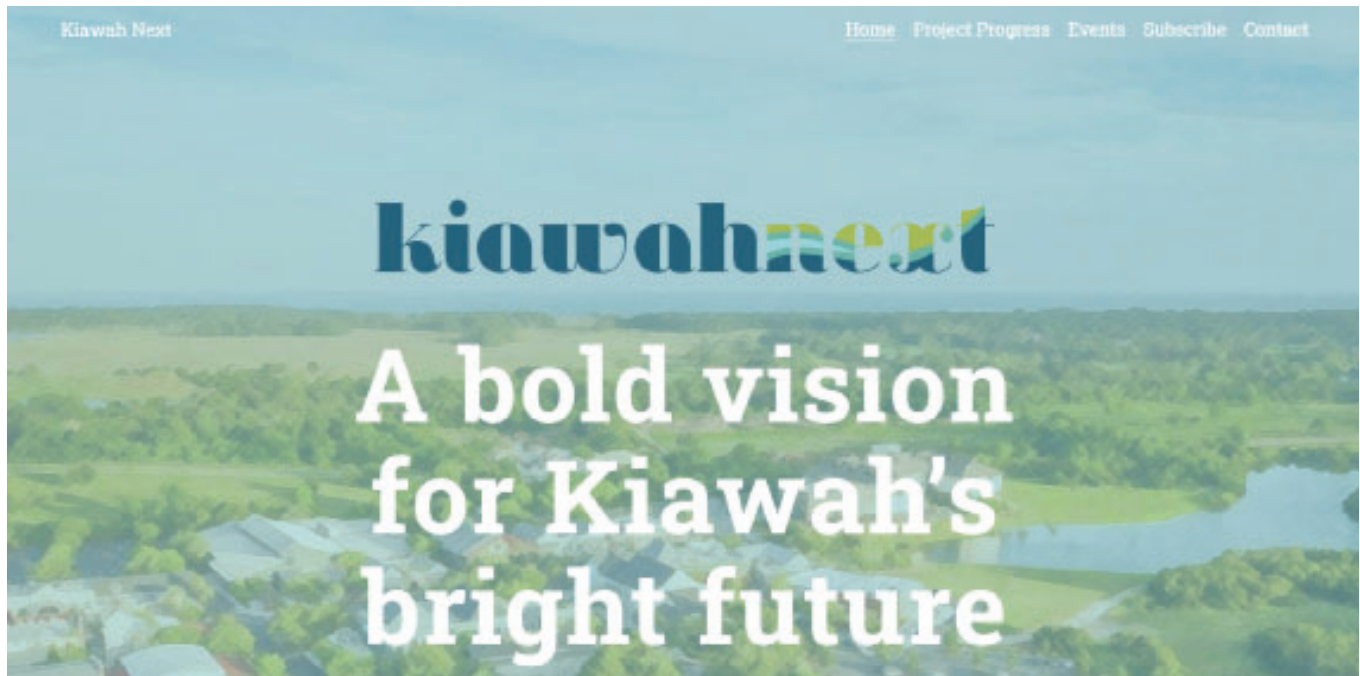
**# 847**

Survey Respondents

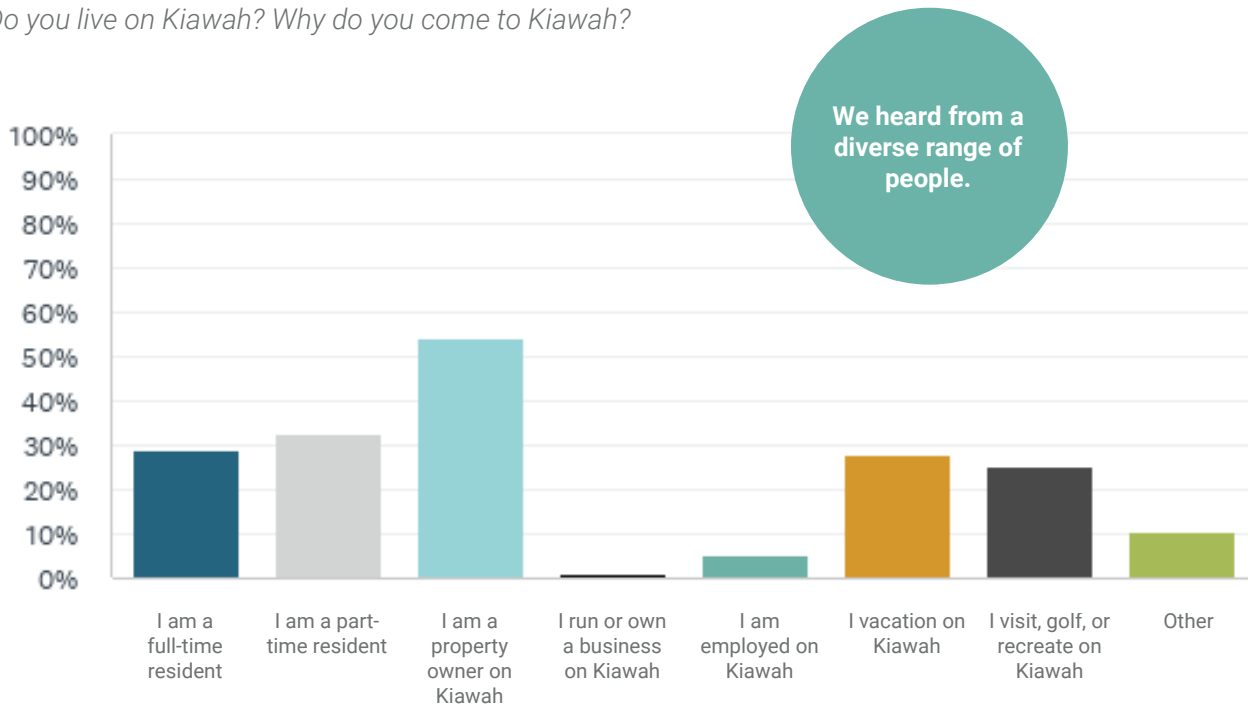
**#10,511**

Survey Question  
Responses

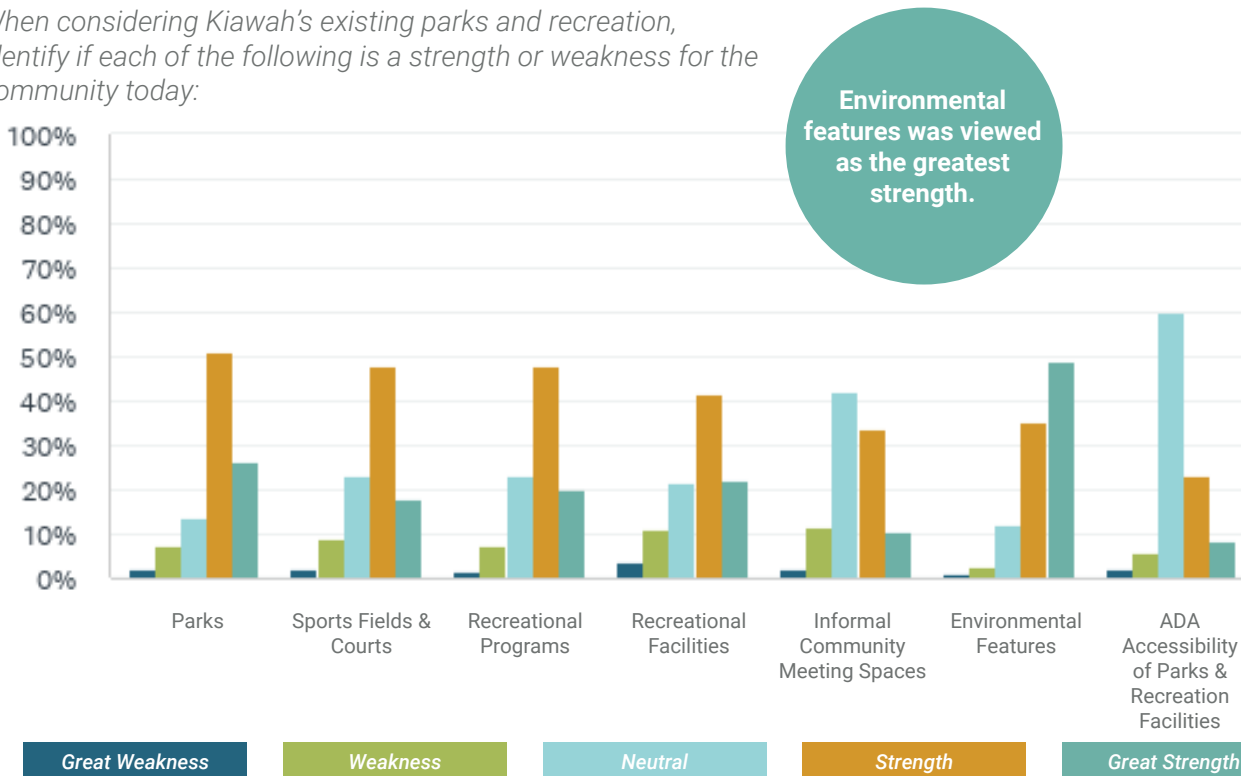
Welcome page to [kiawahnext.com](http://kiawahnext.com) for on-line information, surveys, and plan updates.



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

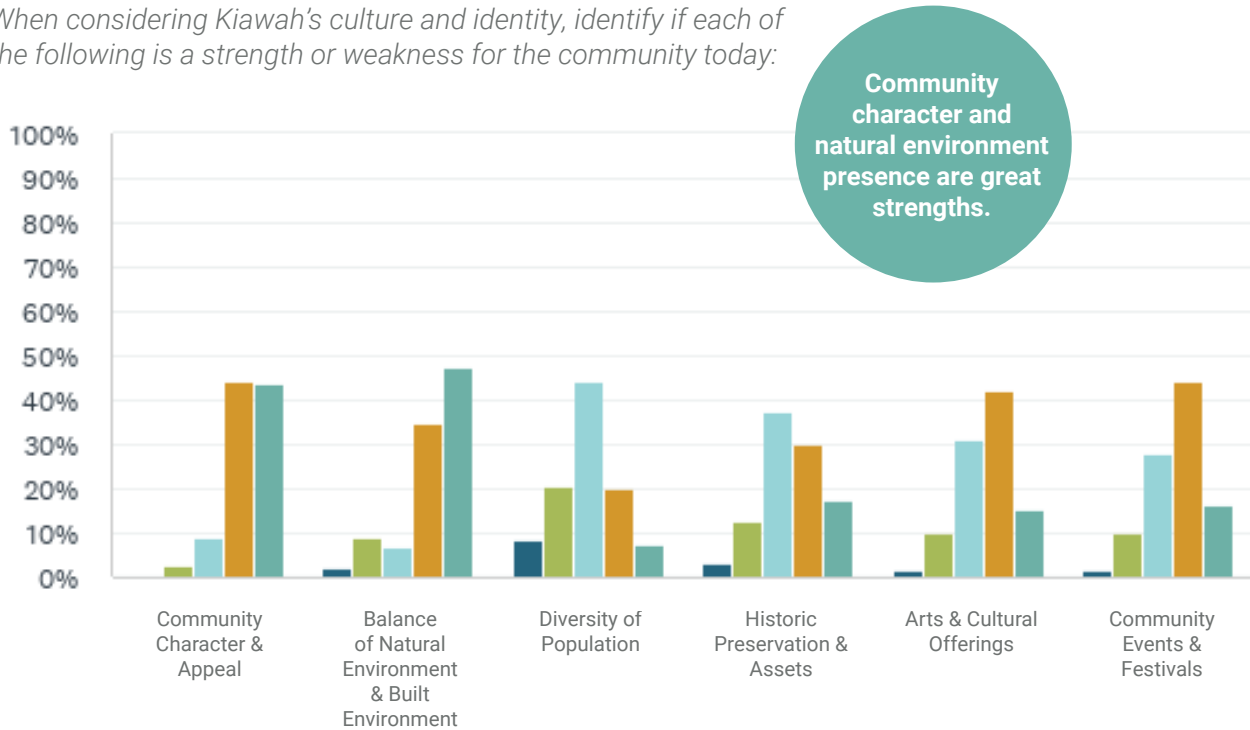


When considering Kiawah's existing parks and recreation, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the community today:



## PROCESS

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



Great Weakness

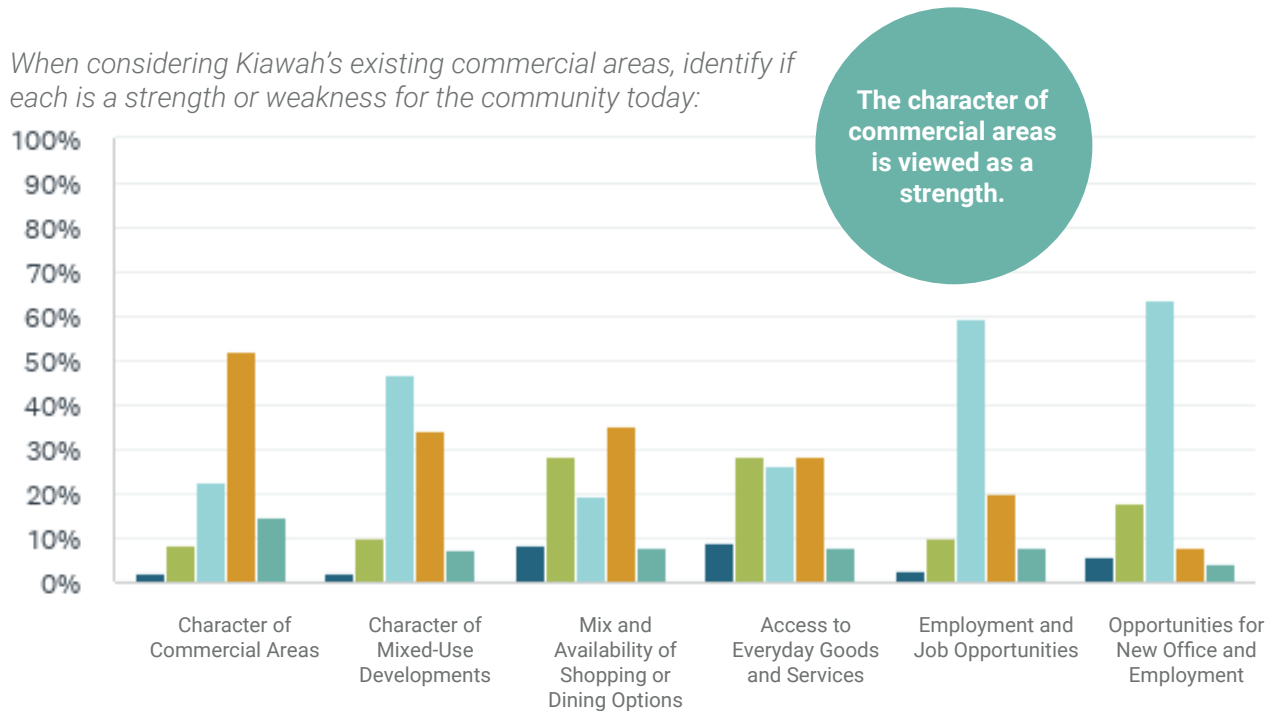
Weakness

Neutral

Strength

Great Strength

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



Great Weakness

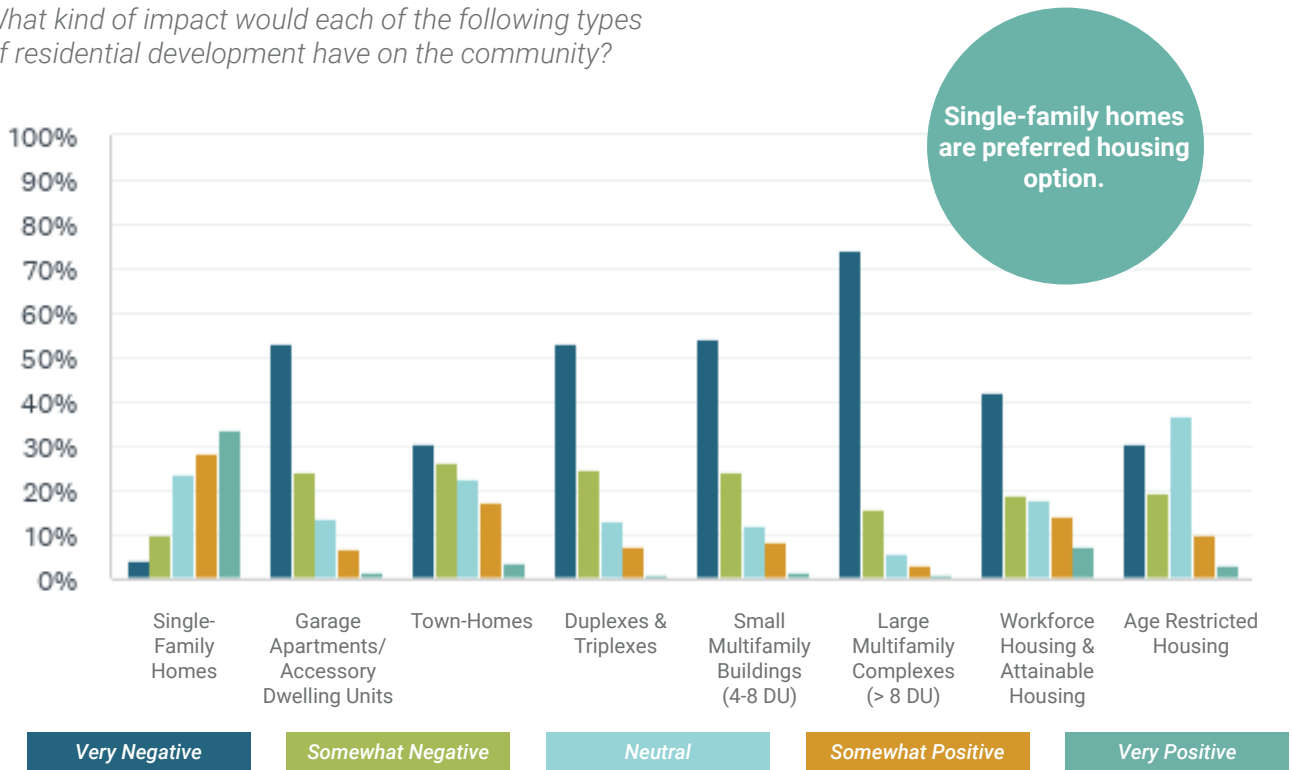
Weakness

Neutral

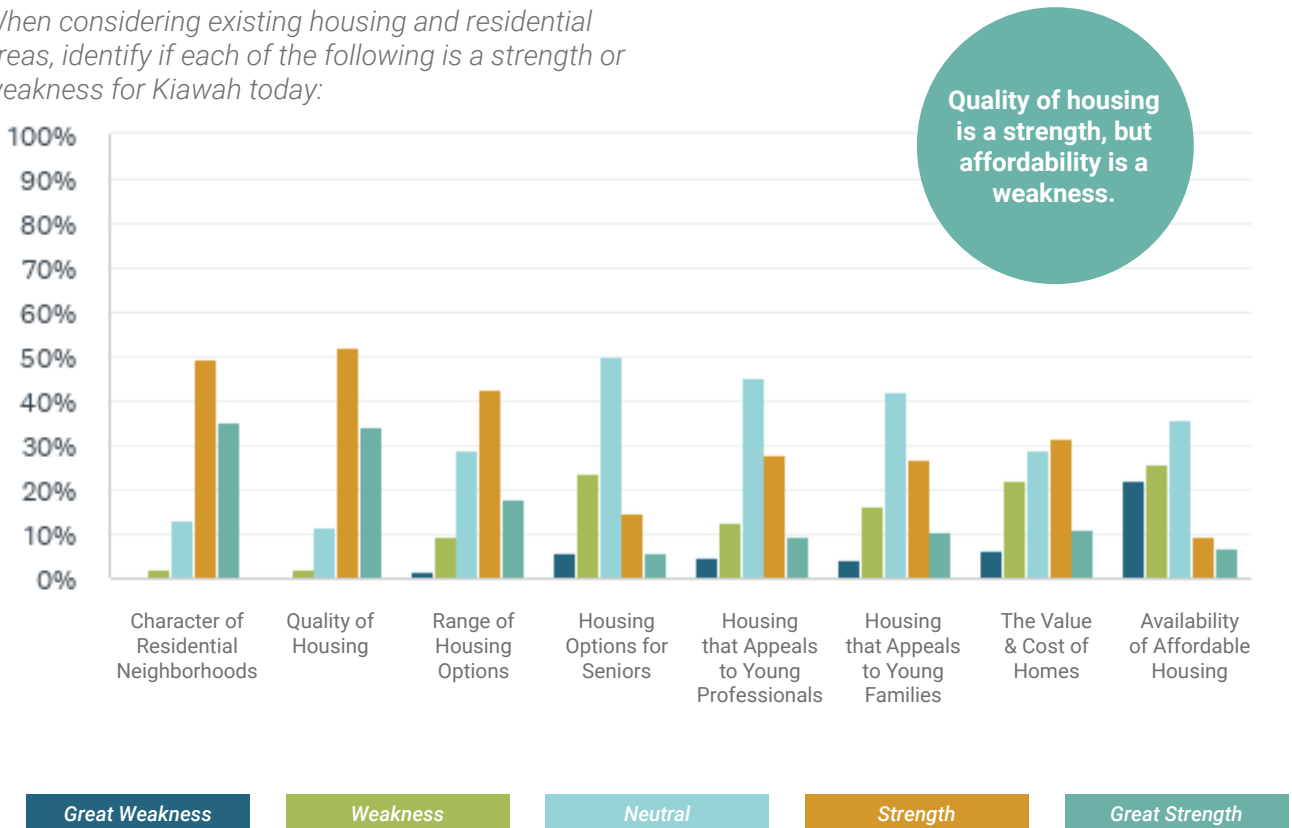
Strength

Great Strength

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

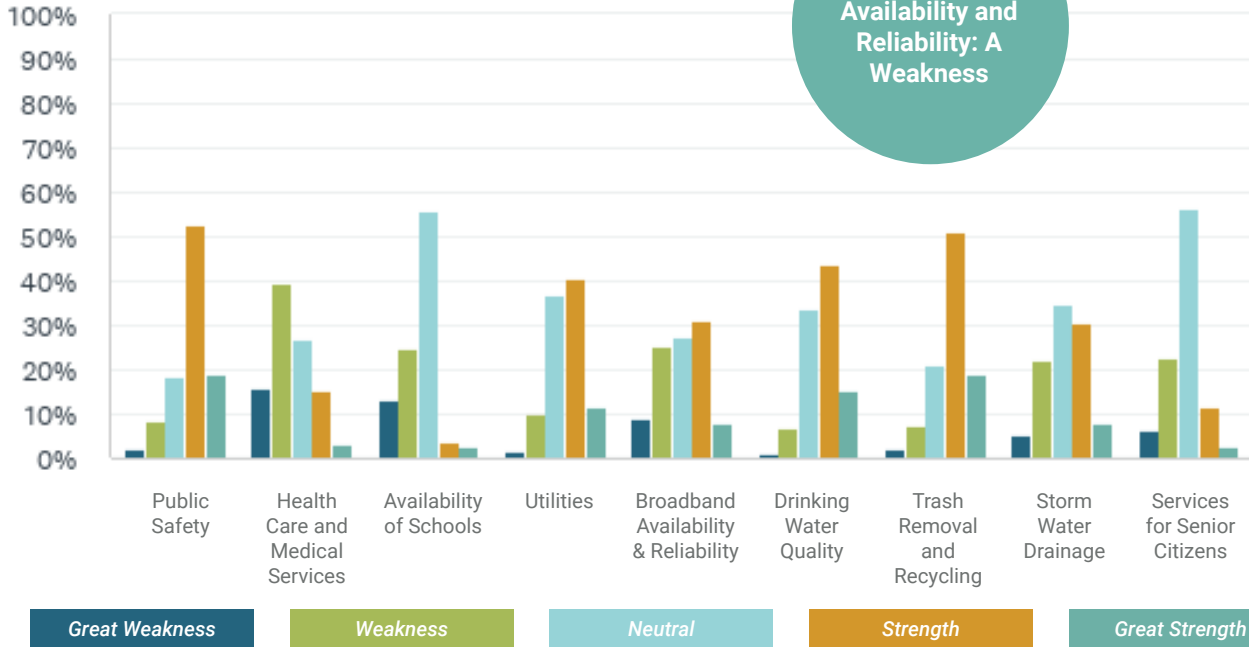


When considering existing housing and residential areas, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for Kiawah today:

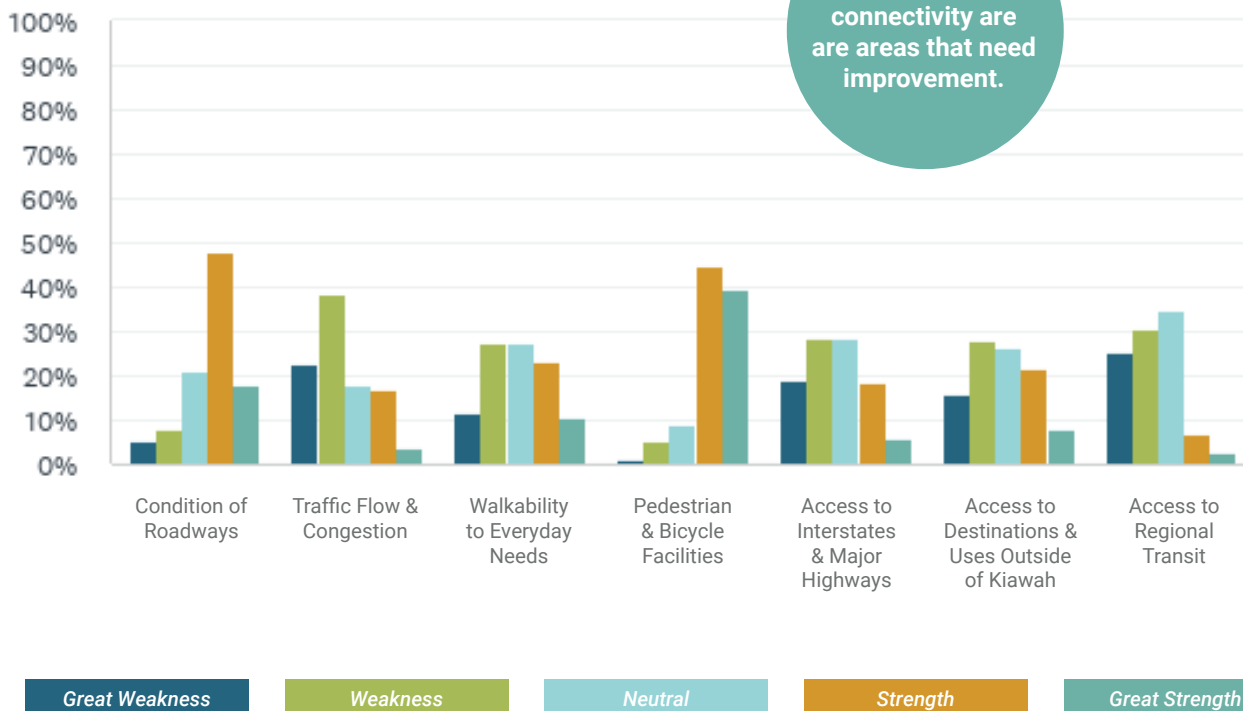


## PROCESS

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 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 a 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 Beach

8b

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

# kiawah**next**

## part III: plan elements

01





# governance structurenext

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

## **Governance Structure**

*While the State does not require this 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 handles core municipal functions including public safety, planning and zoning, and building services, while KICA serves as the HOA, providing services to its members, managing both security gates, and maintaining community infrastructure and amenities.

Effective cooperation between the Town and KICA is essential to address 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 intersect 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.

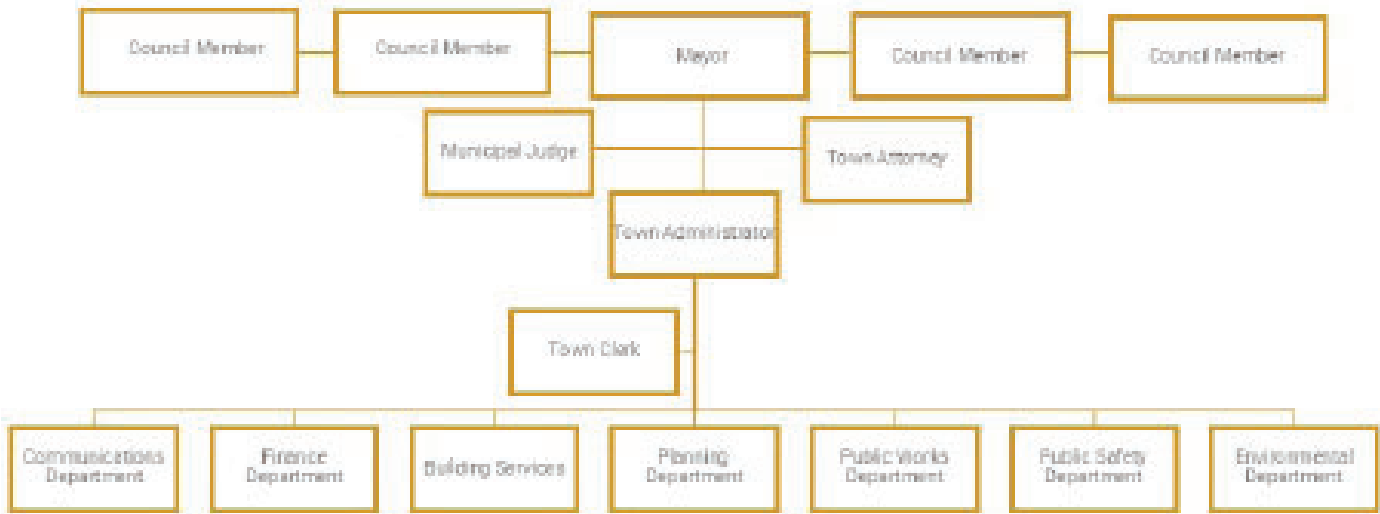
## **Town Governance Structure**

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

#### Planning Commission

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

#### Board of Zoning Appeals

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

#### Ways 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.

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.

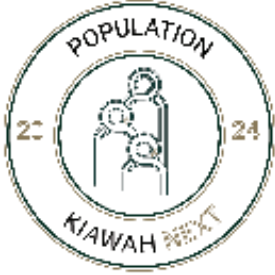
This governance structure requires collaboration to enable Kiawah to maintain high living standards, preserve its natural environment, and address the unique needs of full-time and part-time residents and visitors beyond what a traditional municipal structure alone could achieve. This approach allows 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, KICA board positions, and various commissions and committees, fostering strong community engagement. This structure balances public administration with private community oversight to create 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 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 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-time<sup>1</sup> 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-time<sup>2</sup> residents who own second homes or vacation properties maintain seasonal residence 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.

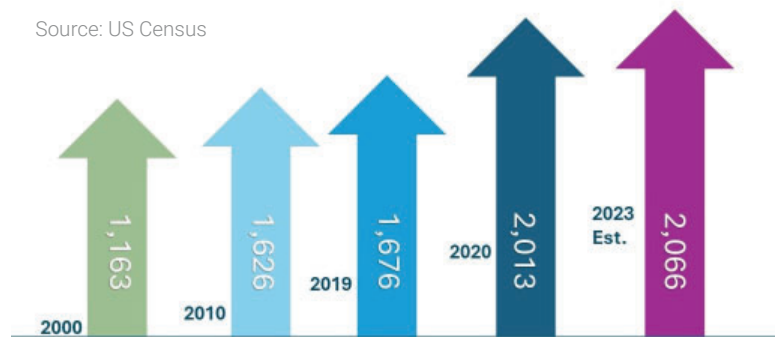
The combined growth patterns of Kiawah and Johns Island emphasize the need for coordinated regional planning to manage development sustainably while preserving the area's unique character and quality of life. Transportation infrastructure demands particular attention, requiring

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

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



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

Individuals who meet at least two of the following criteria:

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

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

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

- Spend less than 183 days per year on Kiawah Island
- Have a primary residence elsewhere for tax purposes
- Are not registered to vote in South Carolina and Municipal Elections
- 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 dramatically from 63.5 years in 2010 to 68.3 years in 2023, and projections indicate it will surpass 70 years within the next five years. 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 various ages throughout the year.

This diverse visitor<sup>3</sup> 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.

To address these varied demographics, Kiawah benefits from versatile community spaces that serve multiple purposes. Freshfields Village and the proposed Andell West are examples of developments that foster a vibrant community atmosphere while 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 create a balanced, dynamic, and vibrant community that addresses the needs of its aging full-time population and the more diverse part-time and visitor demographics. Strategic planning should prioritize age-friendly infrastructure, world-class amenities, enhanced connectivity, and regional collaboration to support the well-being and quality of life for all who enjoy Kiawah now and in the future.

## ***Kiawah's Household and Regional Impacts***

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

<sup>3</sup> Visitors:

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

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 the island’s appeal to retirees and empty nesters.

These figures represent only full-time resident households. Kiawah’s housing is also influenced by part-time property owners, who comprise more than three-quarters of 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 Median household income varies significantly across the region. The Town of Kiawah Island reports \$214,250, compared to Johns Island at \$103,902, Charleston County at \$80,401, and the Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area at \$77,460.

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 valuable 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 Town's economic ecosystem*

## ***Economic Development***

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

## **Overview**

The Town operates a economic model that integrates tourism, residential development, and resort operations into a cohesive and financially robust system. The economy is primarily driven by tourism and service industries, which generate significant revenue and employment opportunities for an estimated 6,500 jobs across all sectors, though employment patterns fluctuate seasonally.

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 \$17.6 million in annual revenues and substantial reserve funds, all achieved without imposing a municipal property tax on residents. This unique fiscal structure, combined with \$96 million in property taxes to Charleston County, underscores the Kiawah's economic impact on the broader region.

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.

## Job and Employer Overview

According to 2023 ESRI estimates, Kiawah directly sustains approximately 6,500 jobs across all employers and sectors. The workforce centers on hospitality, with Accommodations and Food Services comprising nearly half of all positions, followed by Retail Trade at 25 percent. As the island'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

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): Overnight visitors on Kiawah pay a 2 percent state accommodation tax. Most of this revenue must be used for tourism-related expenses, except for \$25,000 plus 5 percent of the remaining total, which goes to the Town's unrestricted general fund. The SATAX Committee recommends how to allocate these funds, subject to Town Council approval.
2. Local Accommodation Tax (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).

**Usage of 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 FY24 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, the Town maintains a strong financial position:

**Financial Highlights**

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

**Revenue Performance**

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

**Fund Balance**

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

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

funding

This stable financial foundation allows the Town to continue investing in infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and tourism-related amenities while maintaining the high quality of life that attracts visitors and property owners to Kiawah Island.

**No Municipal Property Tax**

The Town currently does not impose a municipal property tax. All property taxes paid by residents go directly to Charleston County. 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:

- Kiawah generates 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, indicating a shift toward a more consistent year-round tourism economy.
2. **Business License Fees:** Business license fees have shown steady growth since 2014, rising from \$1.9 million to \$3.9 million in 2022, with only a slight 1.5 percent decline in 2023.
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, 2015-2023.*

## **Economic Impact of Tourism on the Town'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 on Kiawah, with employment trends fluctuating based on seasonal demand patterns.
2. **Business Stimulation:** Tourism supports a vibrant retail sector, which represents about a quarter of all jobs on Kiawah through 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

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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, the island has transformed its tourism landscape, evolving from a primarily domestic, seasonal destination to a year-round, internationally recognized luxury resort area.

In the 2000s, Kiawah began 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 opening of The Sanctuary, a five-star oceanfront hotel, in 2004 marked a pivotal moment in Kiawah's tourism development. This luxury property elevated Kiawah's accommodation offerings while helping attract a more affluent clientele. Consequently, the 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 79.0 percent in 2021 during the pandemic, and stabilizing around 62-65 percent in recent years. Average daily rates showed consistent upward movement, growing from \$366 in 2019 to \$511 in 2024, representing a 40 percent increase over the five-year period.

As travel patterns normalized post-pandemic, occupancy settled into a new equilibrium around 62 to 69 percent, but the market's evolution toward premium positioning became clear. Average daily rates continued their upward trajectory, reaching \$499 in 2022 and ultimately \$511 in 2024, despite a temporary pullback to \$482 in 2023. 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 Kiawah's accessibility 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 easing travel to Kiawah while potentially extending its 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 the island to the mainland creates bottlenecks, with travel times from Charleston doubling or tripling during high-volume periods. This infrastructure struggles to handle peak traffic volumes, leading to increased maintenance needs while affecting both visitors and residents.

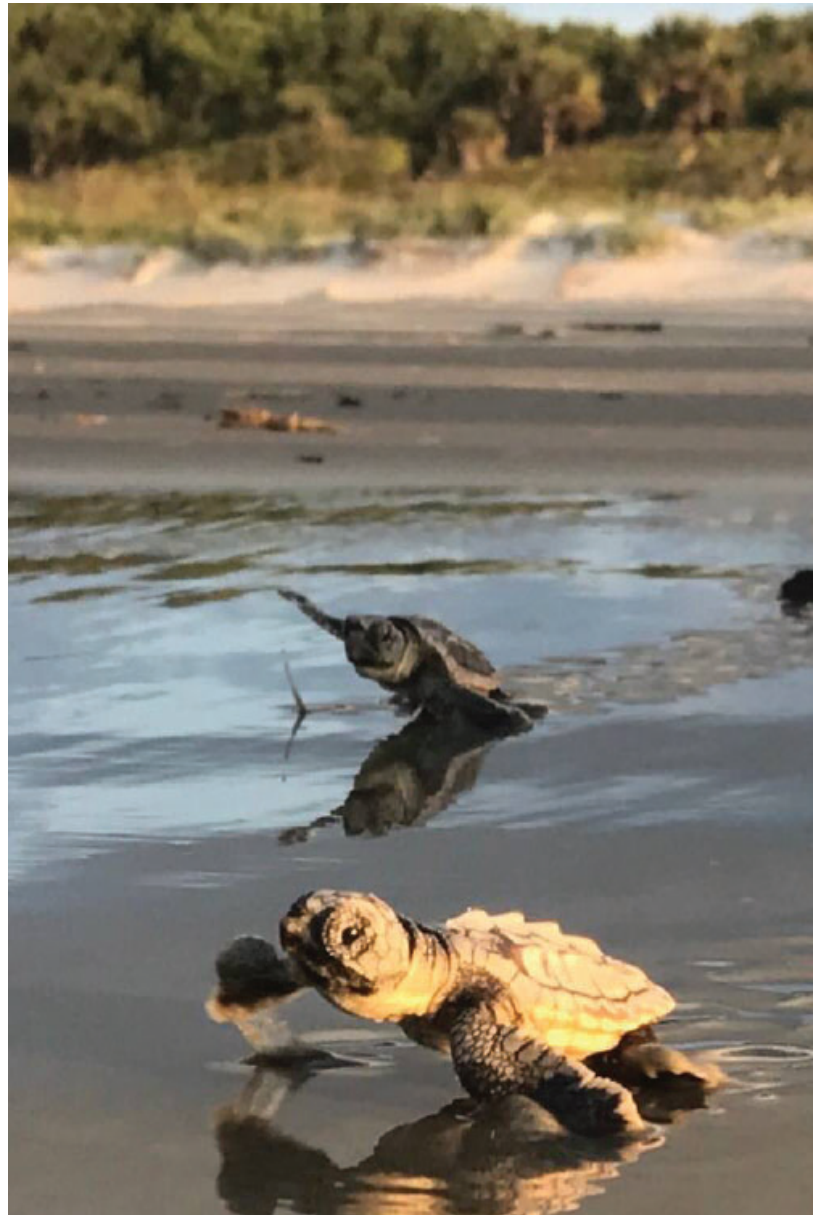
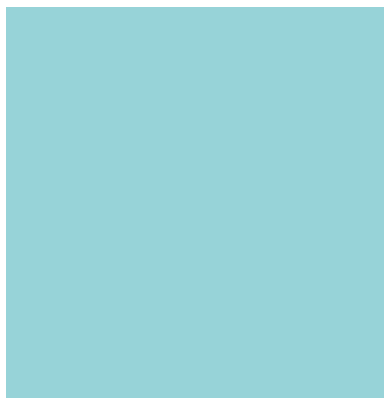
The seasonal nature of tourism has created workforce challenges, as many service industry workers cannot afford housing on or near Kiawah. This situation has resulted in longer commutes for essential staff and occasional workforce shortages during peak periods.

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 island'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 Town 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.

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.

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.

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](http://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:

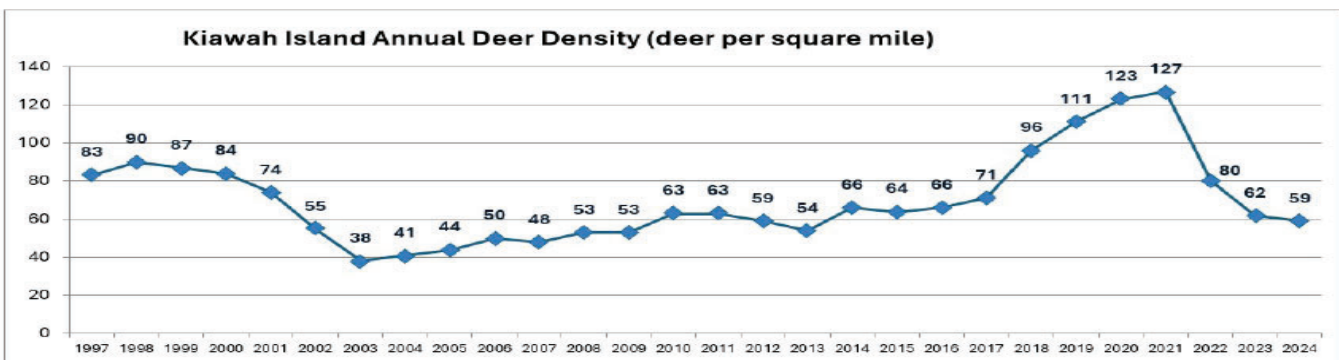
1. Fall Migration Monitoring: Daily banding from August 15 to November 30 at two locations to study songbirds during migration.
2. Winter Banding: Conducted from December through March, focusing on wintering songbird populations, especially Yellow-rumped Warblers.

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 a continuous 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 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**

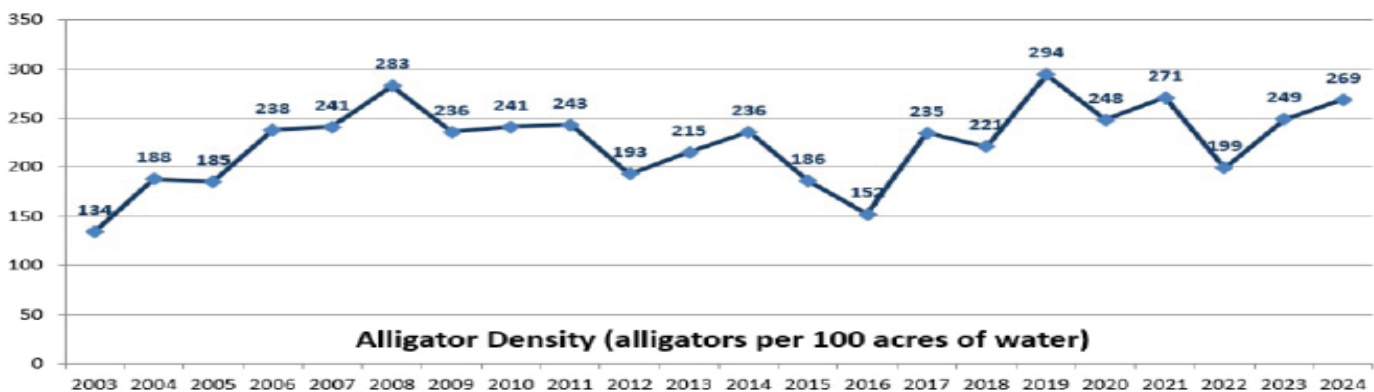
Kiawah is home to a thriving population of American alligators, with estimates suggesting nearly 700 animals inhabiting Kiawah. This significant alligator presence coexists with permanent residents and visitors, creating a unique environment where human-alligator interactions are commonplace.

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.

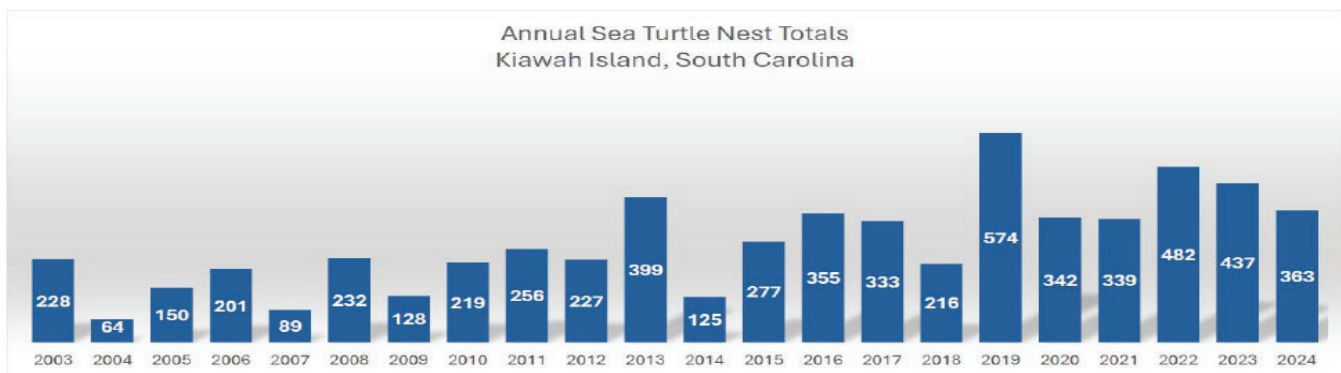
Low-lying nests are relocated to protect against tidal overwash. Volunteers patrol the beach daily during hatching season, monitoring the emergence of hatchlings. After hatching, nests are excavated and inventoried. Detailed records of all activities are reported annually to the South Carolina Department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

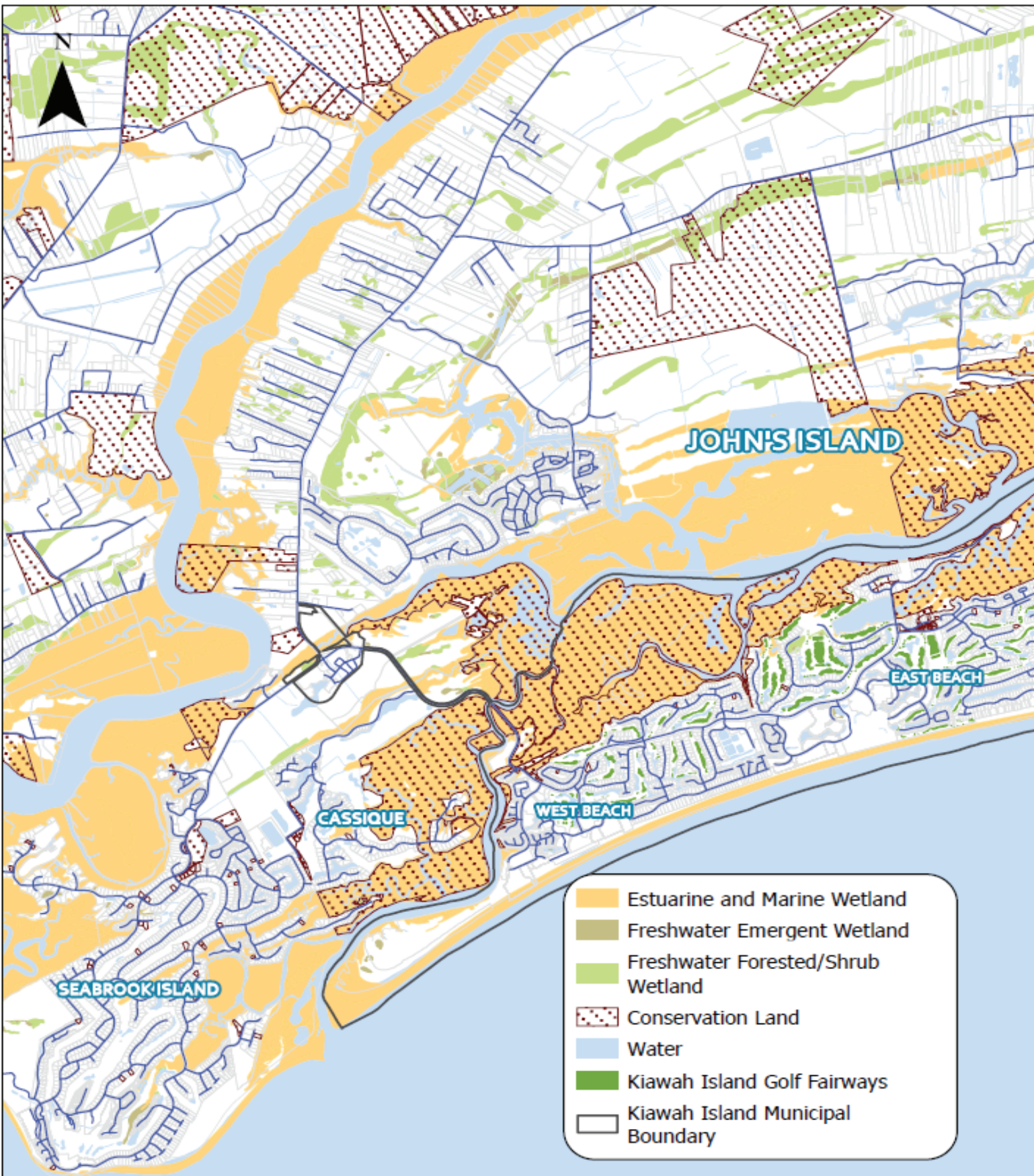
Kiawah is one of few locations in the United States where bottlenose dolphins exhibit strand feeding, a unique hunting behavior where dolphins work together to herd fish onto shore. The Town partners with the Lowcountry Marine Mammal Network to study and protect this rare behavior through a monitoring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

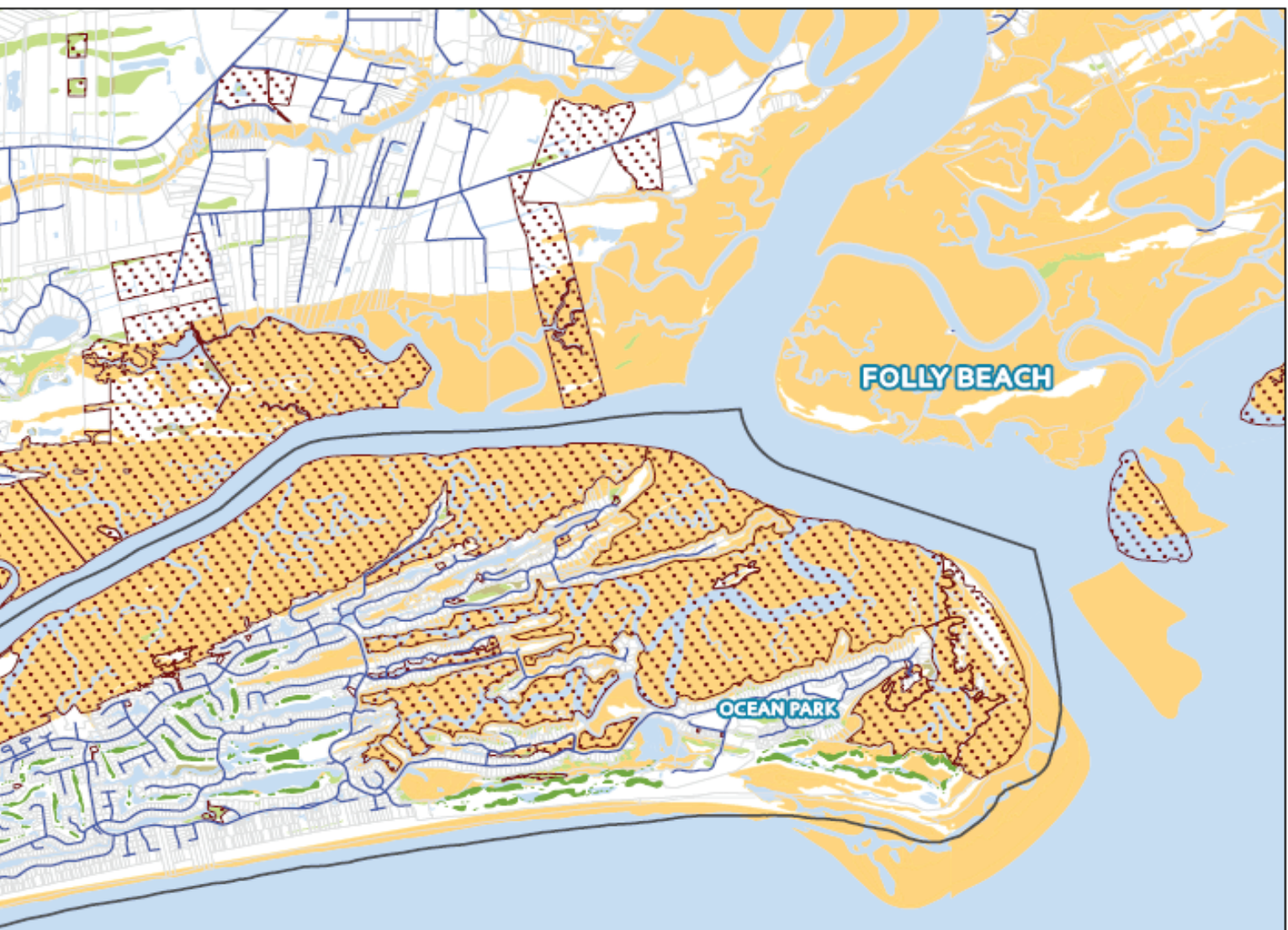
Through this research initiative, twelve individual dolphins have been identified as regular strand feeders in Kiawah’s waters, with some having sighting histories spanning over twenty years. The program has documented critical behaviors, including mothers teaching their young to strand feed while demonstrating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

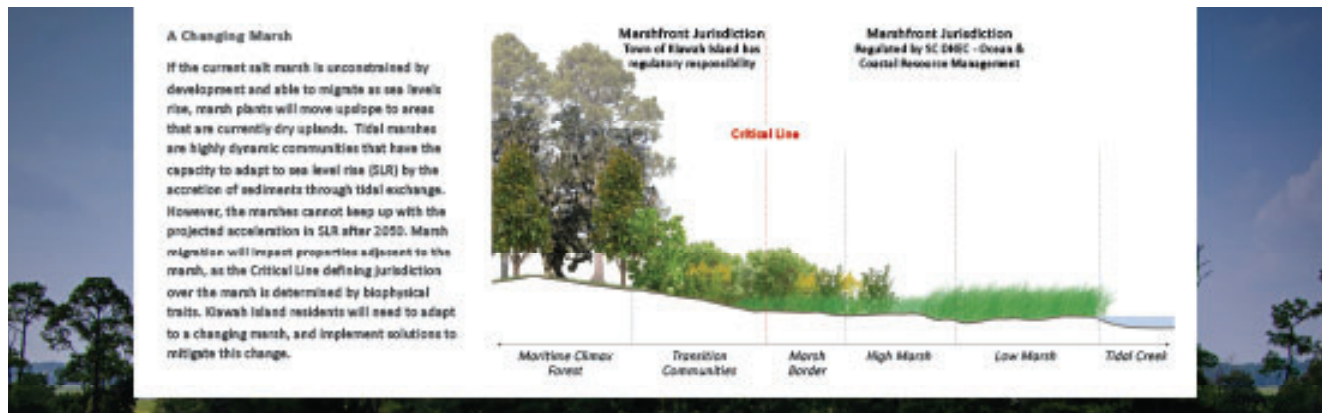
The Town's Local Comprehensive Beach Management Plan serves as a crucial planning and decision-making tool, fulfilling the requirements established by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services - Bureau of Coastal Management (SCDES - BCM) for beachfront municipalities. Since incorporation 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, primarily executed in partnership with Coastal Science and Engineering. Notable interventions include two major restoration projects on East End Beach: the 2006 project, which involved placing 550,000 cubic yards of sand, and the 2015 project, which utilized 100,000 cubic yards of sand. Both projects addressed erosion concerns near residential areas and the Ocean Course. Following Hurricane Irma's impact, the Town completed a sand scraping project from 2017 to 2018 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. This process is part of the state's ongoing coastal management strategy. The Bureau of Coastal Management establishes and reviews two critical jurisdictional lines - the baseline and the setback line, every seven to ten years. These lines delineate the state's direct permitting authority for activities within the beach and dune system critical area, with the baseline being the more seaward line and the setback line being the landward line.

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



Source: *The Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan*

## Marsh Ecosystem and Management Plan

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

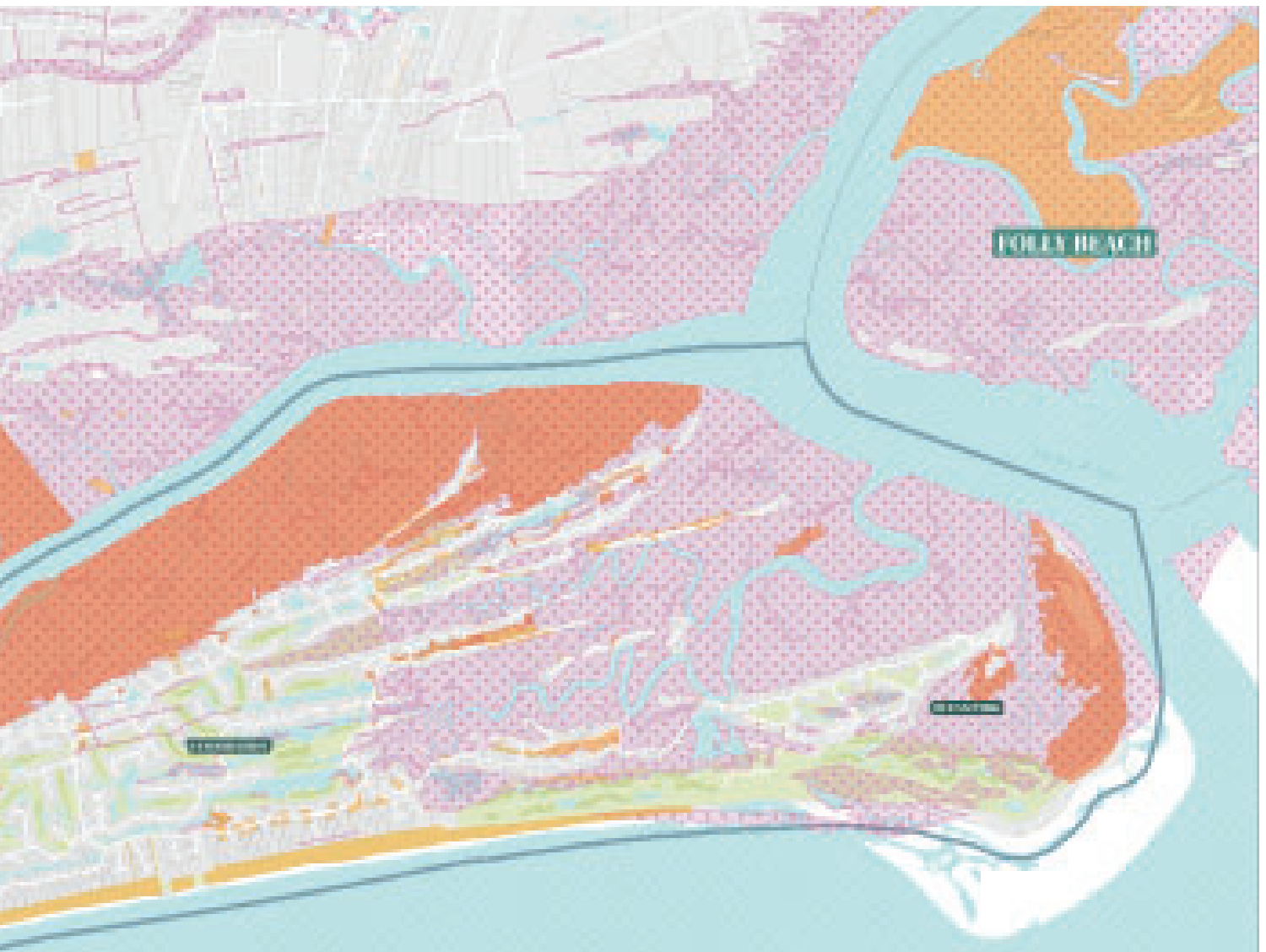
## Key Indicators: UVVR & Shoreline Change



**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.







## ***Wetlands & Protected Land***

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

## ***Captain Sams Spit***

Captain Sams Spit, located at the western end of Kiawah, is an environmentally sensitive and dynamically changing area that plays a crucial role in the island's coastal ecosystem. Captain Sams Inlet bounds this spit, which 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 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, the Roy Barth Tennis Center, and the Kiawah Conservancy’s environmental education initiatives.

While Kiawah offers cultural amenities through these various 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 exploring the possibility of adding a civic and cultural center to the existing municipal property. This potential facility would create dedicated space for cultural events, performing arts programs, and community gatherings while addressing current venue shortages and relieving space constraints in existing facilities.

The concept 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, boost 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.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort 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 and planned Trident Health facilities. The Town recognizes opportunities for improvement through proposed initiatives including establishing a Central Communications Channel for unified emergency communications, expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure, 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 operates under a collaborative law enforcement model with the Charleston County Sheriff's Office. While the Town does not maintain a police force, residents receive sheriff services through county tax contributions. Town Council enhances this baseline coverage through a supplemental partnership that provides additional deputy presence within municipal boundaries using off-duty, sworn personnel.

The Town maintains a Public Safety

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.

### ***Future Healthcare and Emergency Service Infrastructure***

Several planned healthcare and emergency service developments will improve access while reducing 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 Kiawah, Seabrook Island, Johns Island, and Wadmalaw Island. Additionally, Trident Health plans to construct a new medical facility on Johns Island, with construction expected to begin in early 2026, providing emergency care and other medical services to the region.

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

## ***Utility Service Providers***

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 island's water distribution system while managing the wastewater collection system and treatment facility that serves 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 provides redundancy.

### **Seabrook Island Utility Commission**

SIUC, which the Town of Seabrook Island owns, provides water and wastewater services to Freshfields Village, which is located within the Town limits of Kiawah.

### **Municipal Center Utilities**

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

## ***Solid Waste Management***

The Town provides a comprehensive solid waste program for property owners. This service includes garbage, recycling, yard debris, brown trash, paper shredding, and hazardous waste 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 is studying revision of its cell tower ordinance to address these coverage gaps. Current regulations emphasize co-location and concealment requirements while limiting tower heights, creating challenges for carriers attempting to upgrade equipment or expand coverage. Updates to the ordinance should carefully balance the need for improved cellular coverage with maintaining the Town’s Living with Nature philosophy.

### **Central Communications Channel**

The Town proposes a Central Communications Channel to coordinate

all key island stakeholders, managed and operated by the Town’s Public Safety or Communications Department. This department would be responsible for overseeing the communication system while ensuring its effectiveness and maintaining its operation.

The proposed 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 and direct method of communication 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 island’s population.

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

## ***Electric Vehicle Infrastructure***

With the growing popularity 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. To contribute to this environmental initiative, the Town should consider implementing a standardized network of EV charging stations throughout the community.

Currently, the Town has installed three public EV charging stations located behind Town Hall, providing a foundation for expanded charging infrastructure.

## ***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 behind the gate. 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 property owners 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.

KIC 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 seven 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 dedicated 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 dedicated Town community facility would address these needs by providing an accessible gathering space for residents, property owners, and visitors. Such a space could serve multiple functions 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 only 29 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, bringing the current total to 4,350 residential units. 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 capacity reaches 5,221 units, representing potential growth of 871 additional units beyond current inventory, or 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

*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.*

segments in 2024. Single-family homes maintained a median price of \$3 million, 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:** The study showed a positive trend in renovation activity, with renovation permits increasing significantly since 2010.

*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.*

## HOUSING

Residential renovations:

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

- 3. Challenges for Villas:** Reinvestment in villas is more difficult under shared ownership models, posing long-term challenges for maintaining 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 long-term property value growth and continuing to attract new generations of buyers while preserving its unique natural environment and community character.

### **Workforce Housing**

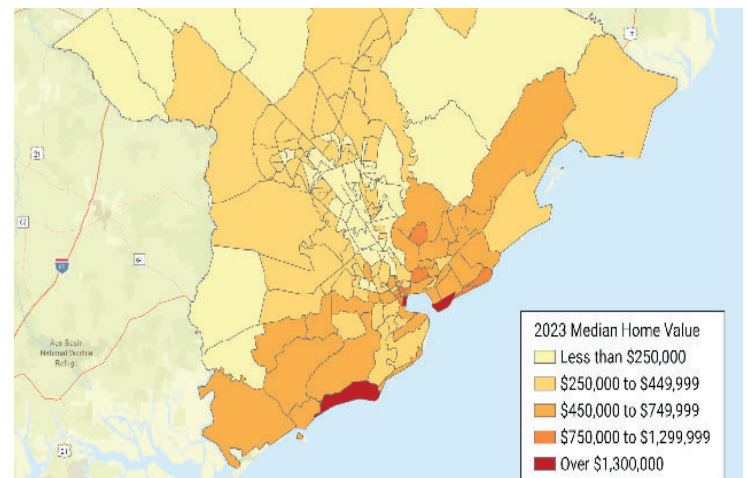
Finding workforce housing represents a regional challenge, with one of the key

issues being the absence of workforce housing options within Kiawah or 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 results from 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 dynamic.

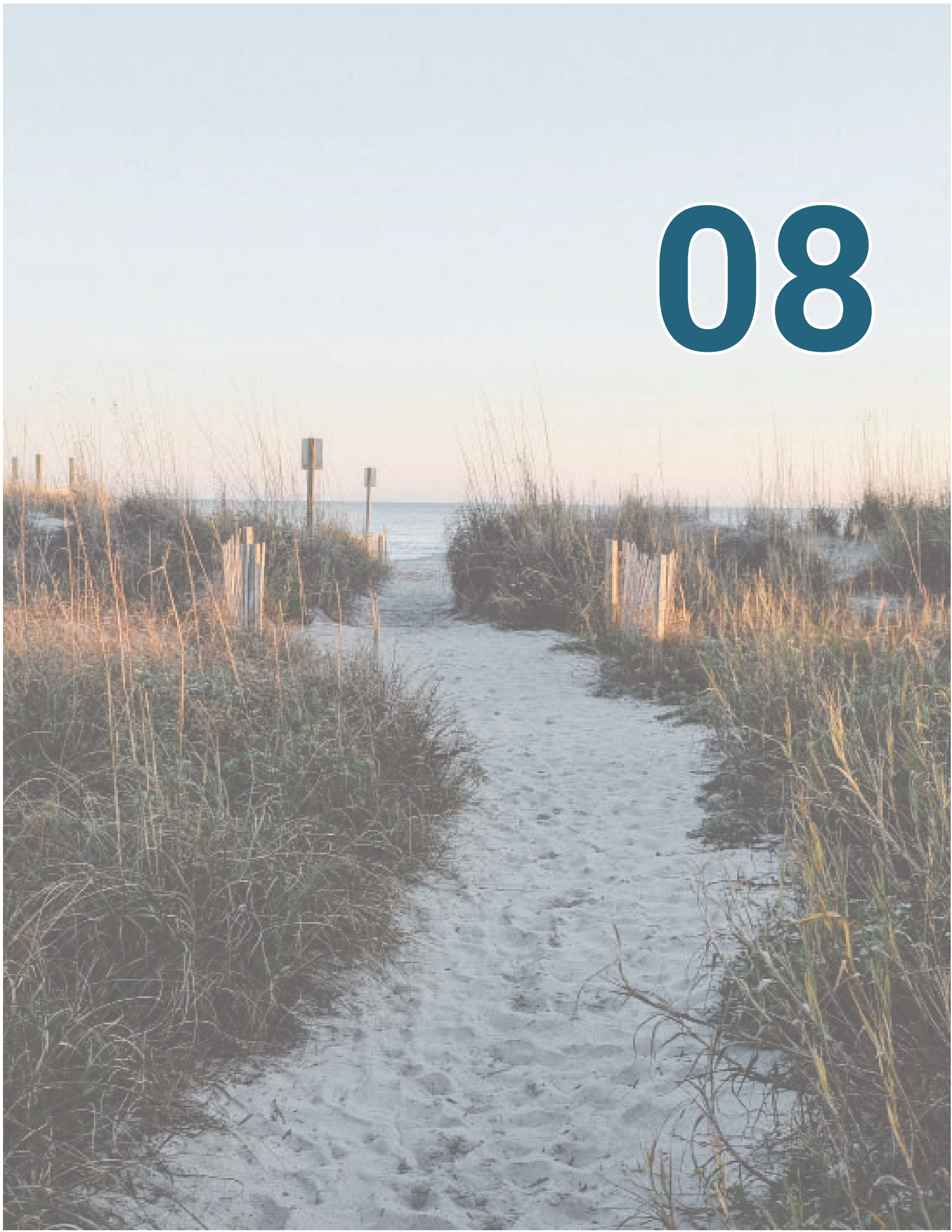


**Median Home Values, Charleston MSA, 2023**

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 multi-family units, bringing total potential residential development to 5,221 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 5,221. 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
<b>Total Residential Units</b>	<b>4087</b>

### Under Construction Residential Units

Single Family	88
Multifamily ( <i>Seafields, Ocean Pines</i> )	175
<b>Total Residential Units</b>	<b>263</b>

### Future Single Family Residential

Undeveloped Single Family Residential Lots	380
Conservation and Common Properties	-39
<b>Single Family Residential Potential</b>	<b>341</b>

### Future Multifamily Residential

<sup>1</sup> Kiawah Island Golf Resort - Residential	420
<sup>2</sup> Kiawah Partners ( <i>Upper Beachwalker Parcels</i> )	72
<sup>3</sup> Freshfields Village - Residential	38
<b>Multifamily Residential Potential</b>	<b>530</b>

### Total Potential Residential Units **5221**

### Current Hotel Rooms

The Sanctuary	255
Andell Inn	99
<b>Total Hotel Rooms</b>	<b>354</b>

### Future Hotel Rooms

<sup>1</sup> East Beach	150
West Beach	150
<b>Total Potential Hotel Rooms</b>	<b>300</b>

### Total Potential Hotel Rooms **654**

Notes: <sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Upper Beachwalker parcels include parcels 207050004, 2070500117,-116,-120. <sup>3</sup> Remaining FFV residential development is projected from the balance of up to 200 total residential units, which may only occur on select parcels remaining.

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

## Conservation Through Annexation

Annexation is a request by a private property owner, multiple owners, or a government entity to include their property within the service area and jurisdiction of the Town. The Town Council is 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 Zonig Ordinance.

## ***Future Land Use Categories***

Future land use guides the location and types of proposed development to align with the Town's Land Use Planning 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 provides and 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 complement 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 stations and Kiawah Island Utility.

## 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.

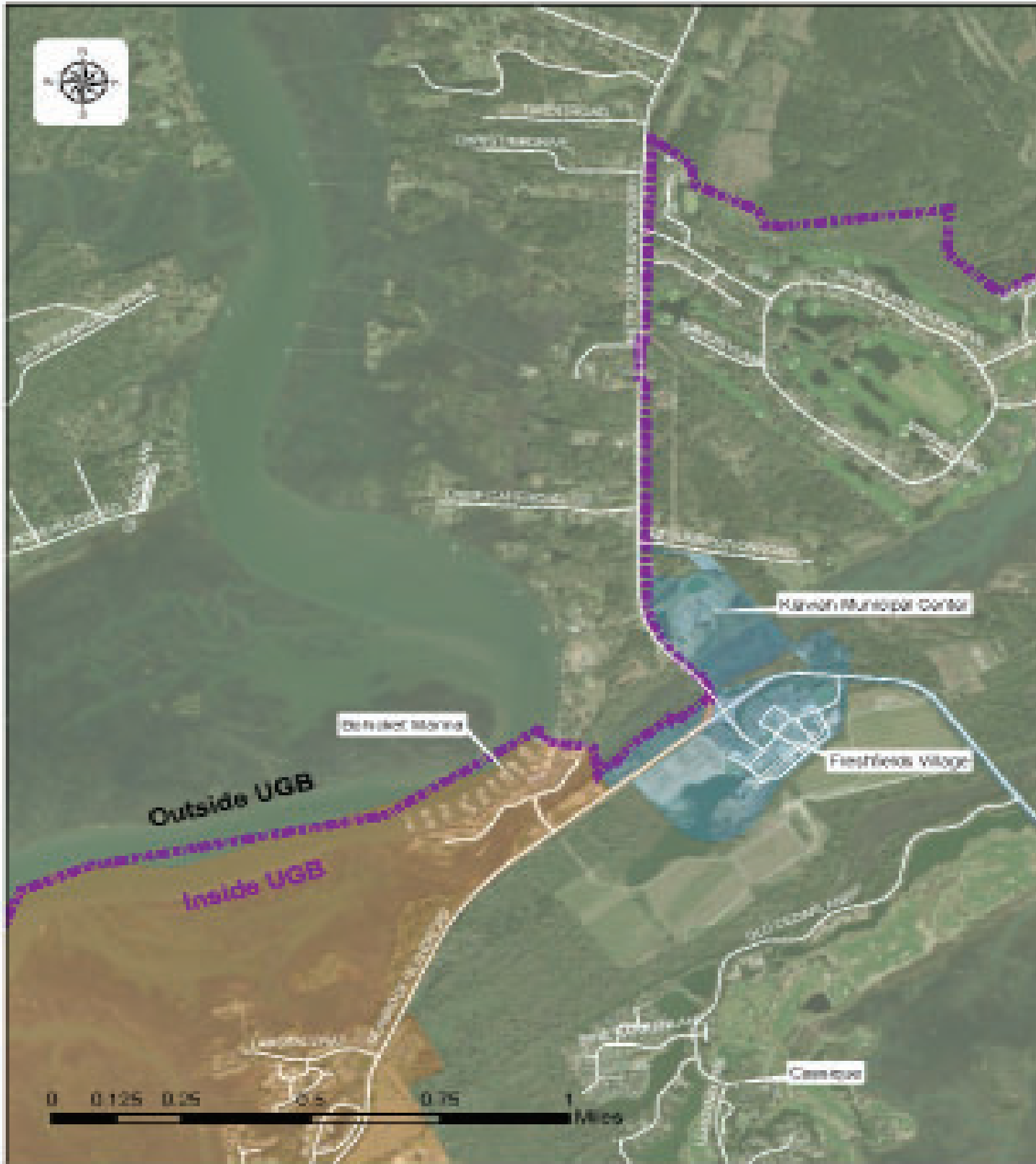
The UGB ensures that the approach to Kiawah Island along the Betsy Kerrison Parkway retains its low-density character. Effective management of the UGB requires active collaboration between Kiawah Island, Charleston County, and neighboring communities such as Seabrook Island. This cooperation is important 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.

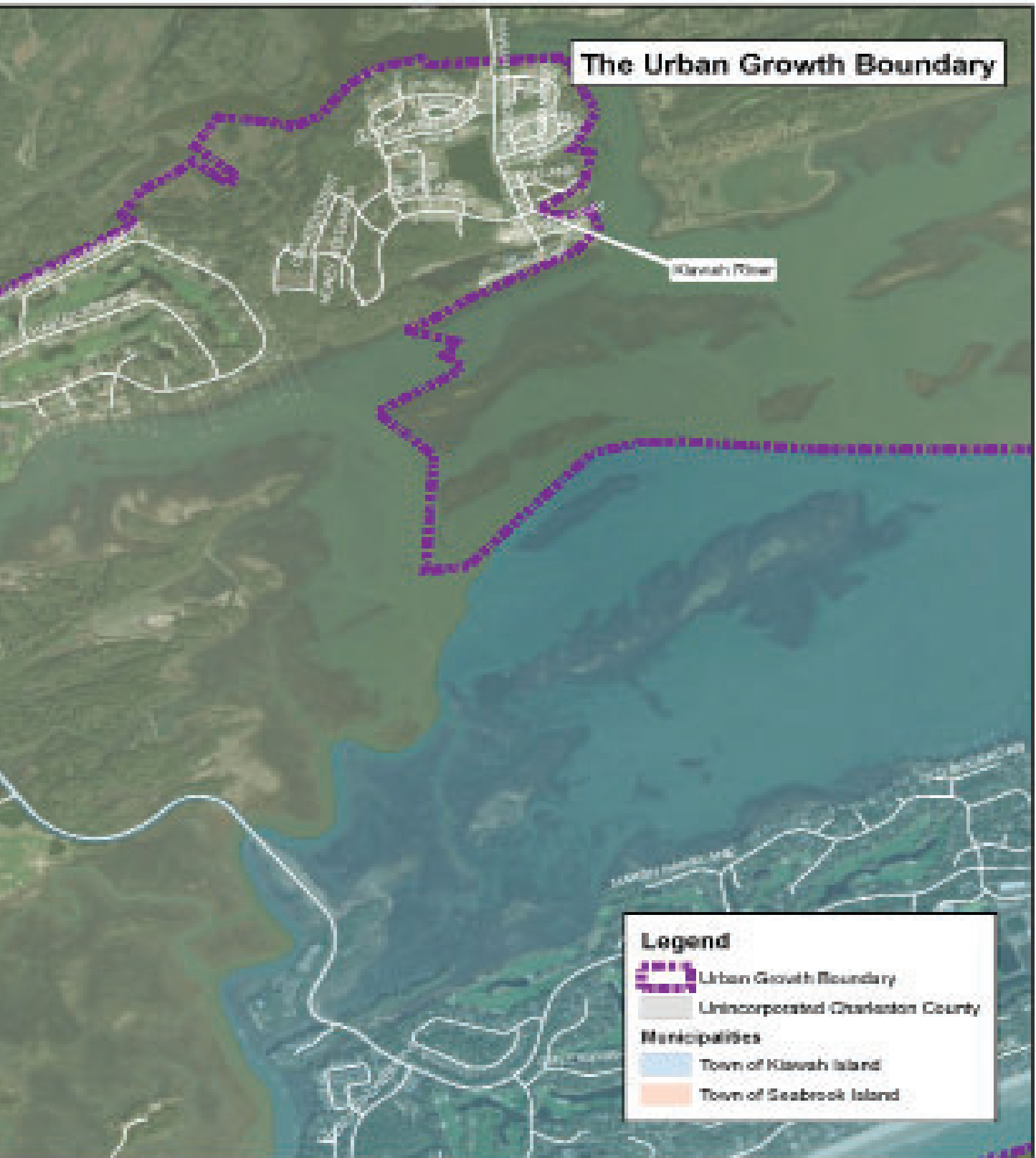
The UGB is more than just a line on a map; it's a vital planning tool that helps preserve the natural beauty, ecological integrity, and quality of life that make the Charleston County area unique. It allows the region to thrive as a model of sustainable coastal development for generations to come.



Source: Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department



Source: Town of Kiawah Island Planning Department







## Future Land Use Map of Kiawah Island

### Future Land Use Map

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

09





# transportationnext

## *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. 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 while supporting 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.

TRANSPORTATION



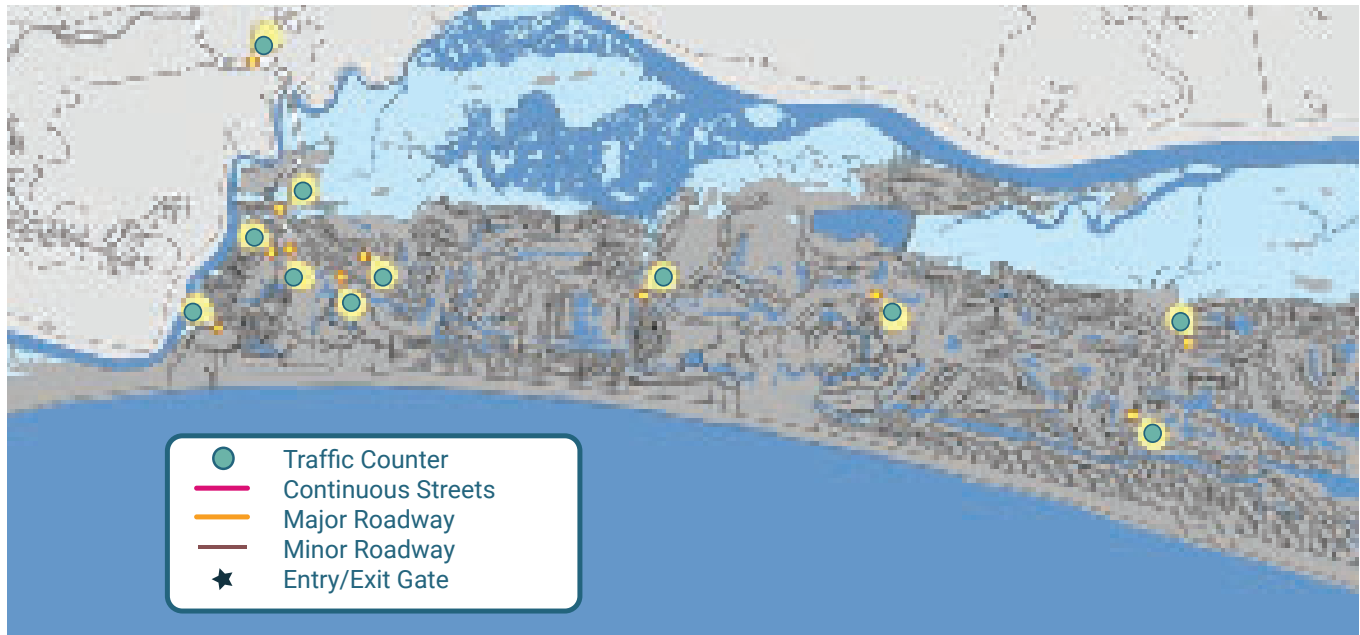


## ***Greenspace Network: Parks, Trails & Open Space***

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

## Traffic Counting Locations, Town of Kiawah Island, 2022

Source: Kiawah Island Parkway Traffic Update



### Traffic Evaluation and Management

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

To alleviate congestion at the Beachwalker Drive intersection, the Town modified the traffic pattern, eliminated the outbound stop sign, and 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 improvement recommendations included:

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

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

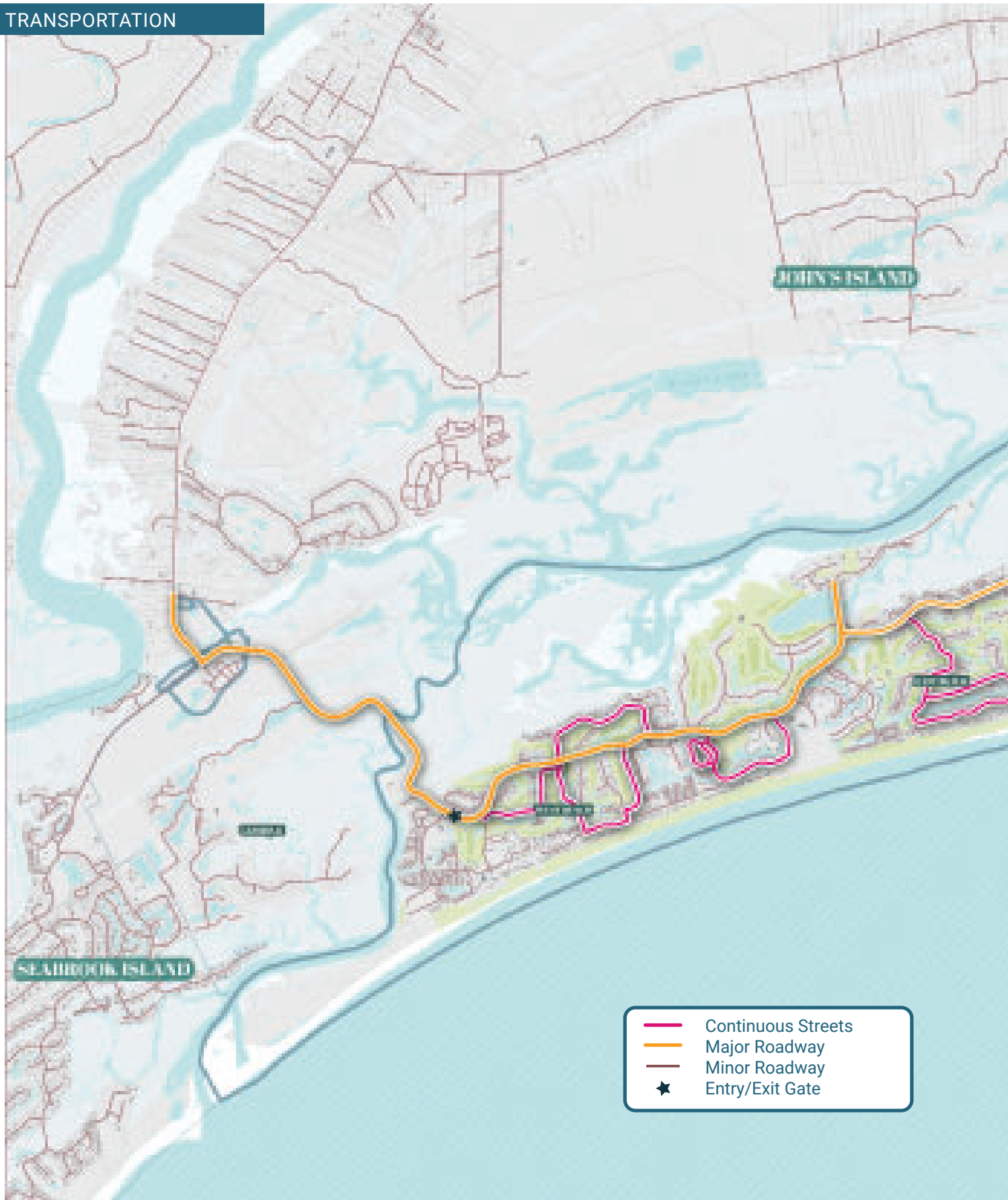
For long-term improvements, the study recommends:

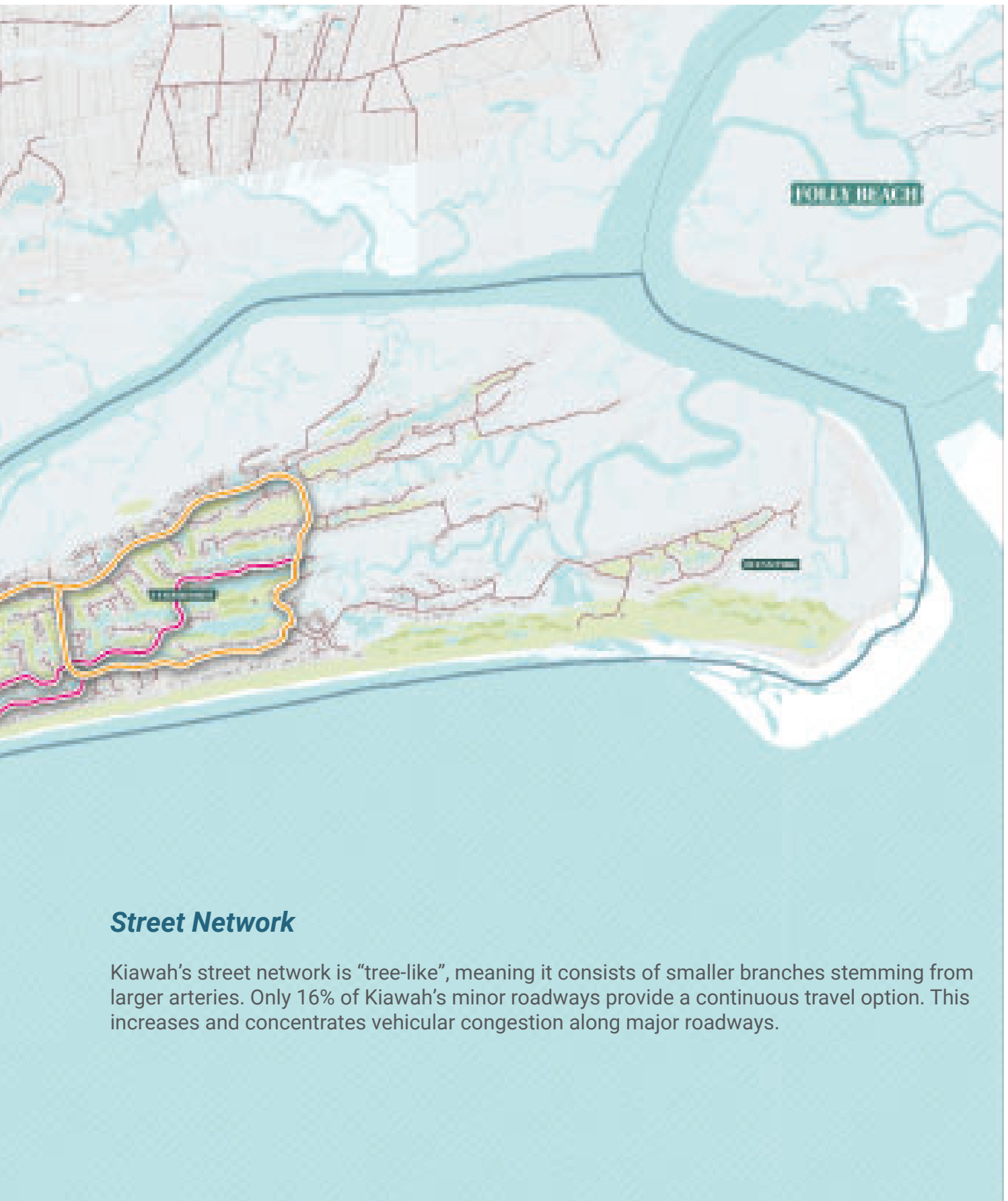
1. Installing a turbo roundabout at Kiawah Island Parkway/Seabrook Island Road and Betsy Kerrison Parkway with a pedestrian bridge across Haulover Creek
2. Constructing turn lanes at Betsy Kerrison Parkway and Camp Care Road.
3. Considering a roundabout at Seabrook Island Road and Andell Bluff Boulevard.

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

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

TRANSPORTATION





## ***Street Network***

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

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

The Town has implemented improvements to Beachwalker Drive and Kiawah Island Parkway in recent years. On Beachwalker Drive, the Town completed several improvements in 2021, including 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 study's findings, the Town implemented strategic infrastructure modifications in 2024. At the intersection, the westbound through lane was converted to a free-flow lane while the westbound left-turn lane was channelized with a stop sign control. At the main gate, a new landscape island was installed to enhance both aesthetics and traffic management. The entire area underwent restriping to create a merge lane while significantly improving traffic storage capacity. Although initial plans included adding a right-turn lane, this improvement was not implemented due to complications with utility infrastructure and land acquisition requirements.

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

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

The study revealed several key findings. Observations revealed 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 this intersection, necessitating a roundabout.

Understanding the different ownership and jurisdictions of the roads is crucial when considering these improvements. Kiawah Island Parkway, from the roundabout at Freshfields to the front gate, is owned and maintained by the Town, 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 while serving 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 while playing 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 to the mainland, 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 normal roundabouts at key intersections along Kiawah Island Parkway can help regulate traffic flow more efficiently. Additionally, developing a real-time traffic monitoring system for the Parkway would provide valuable data for planners and residents,

allowing for more informed decision-making.

- 3. Main Gate**  
The intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive is a critical juncture that often experiences heavy congestion. Relocating KICA's gate office to a more suitable location could help reduce traffic backup at the intersection of Kiawah Island Parkway and Beachwalker Drive. 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, more parking management ideas, such as implementing a smart parking system, should be explored.
- 5. Alternative Transportation Promotion**  
An island-wide electric shuttle system could provide an eco-friendly alternative for getting around the island, reducing the number of car trips made by residents and visitors. The Town or a private entity would own and operate this service.
- 6. Infrastructure Resilience**  
Identifying and protecting critical road infrastructure against environmental threats, such as flooding and erosion, is crucial for maintaining access to Kiawah.
- 7. Technology Integration for Traffic Management**  
Leveraging technology can greatly enhance traffic management efforts. Developing a Kiawah traffic app to provide real-time updates can help

## TRANSPORTATION

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

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

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

A wooden boardwalk with railings winds through a lush, green marshy area. Tall pine trees are scattered throughout the landscape under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The boardwalk is made of weathered wooden planks and leads the eye into the distance.

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 of the Town's Comprehensive Plan 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 CIP will be updated by Town Council during the annual budget process while involving evaluation of projected fund balances compared to the ten-year funding requirements for each priority. After adopting the ten-year plan, the Town should review its progress annually, adjust or modify it, and incorporate recommendations as deemed appropriate.

The Town Council will update the CIP during the annual budget process, involving an evaluation of projected fund balances against the ten-year funding requirements for each priority. After adopting the ten-year

plan, the Town should review its progress annually while adjusting or modifying it as needed and incorporating recommendations as deemed appropriate.

As such, the CIP will be a dynamic document that 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 while discussing 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, 2024.

### Local Funding:

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

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

These dedicated funds, totaling \$9,375,099, reflect the Town’s strategic approach to financial management 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 a barrier

island, 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 coastal flooding a concern for Kiawah and its resident population.

To prioritize funding for emergency management, the Town will conduct reasonable assessments of its infrastructure while identifying 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 and recognizing the need to address other hazards, including hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, explosions, and erosion.

## PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

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

The South Carolina Water Utilities parent company to Kiawah Island Utility Company owns and operates the water and wastewater services to Kiawah, where the original water lines servicing the island require regular maintenance. A new secondary water line was installed to improve services to the island while the 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.

11





# resiliencynext

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

## **Resiliency**

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

## **Overview**

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

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

The Town’s approach to resiliency is multifaceted, encompassing both natural and built environment strategies. Environmental initiatives include the Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan with its four-pronged approach to monitor, protect, engage, and restore marsh ecosystems, advanced stormwater management ordinances aligned with Low Impact Development practices, and beach sustainability programs that leverage natural processes for shoreline protection. The Town actively employs real-time flood monitoring systems while testing water sources for contaminants and exploring nature-based solutions such as living shorelines that have proven successful in other coastal communities.

## **Resiliency**

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

### **Environmental and Coastal Resilience**

The Town adopted a Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan, which provides a structured approach to monitoring, protecting, engaging, and restoring the island's marsh ecosystems. As part of this plan, the Town conducts regular monitoring and management activities to assess marsh health 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 while further demonstrating the Town's commitment to proactive water quality management.

### **Marsh Management and Conservation**

Marsh conservation and shoreline stability are priorities within the Town's Comprehensive Marsh Management Plan. The Town is actively managing its marsh ecosystems through regular monitoring programs and targeted restoration efforts 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 while promoting 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. 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, such as ambassador initiatives similar to those seen in other coastal resilience projects such as 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, pursuing partnerships to advance green energy use, and pursuing green tourism certification as a Green Tourist Destination will remain central to Kiawah’s sustainability goals.

### **Resiliency Committee and Long-term Implementation**

The Town established the Resiliency Committee to advise 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 while promoting community education and awareness, identifying funding opportunities, and ensuring comprehensive coordination across different organizational entities.

Through these structured efforts, Kiawah will continuously adapt while 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 while reviewing and updating Town zoning standards to account for environmental changes and trends.

### **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 while ensuring 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.

Previously, an objective under Community Facilities involved 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.

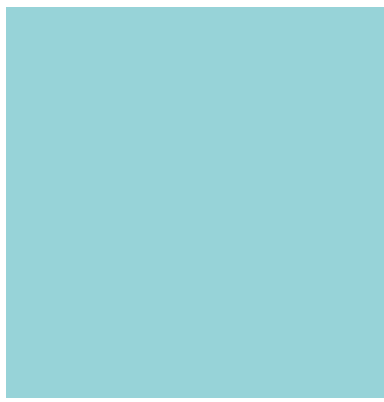
As coastal communities face increasing threats from rising sea levels and extreme

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 while noting that Kiawah's interconnected ponds can manage rainfall from a 100-year flood but may face challenges with increasing flood frequency. Continuous evaluation and maintenance of this system, along with ensuring critical roadways remain passable for emergency services, are essential for long-term resilience. A recent nor'easter in December 2023 underscored these vulnerabilities by causing severe flooding that affected critical infrastructure and roads.





TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND | 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

# kiawahnext

ADOPTED XX.XX.2025