

Minutes of the April 10, 2024 Town of Kiawah Island Environmental Committee Meeting

1. Meeting minutes, Approval, December 13th meeting, February 14th meeting

The transcript details a meeting where the first order of business was to approve the minutes from the December 13th meeting, which were sent out the previous day. Lynne Sager motioned to approve the minutes, and Lee Bundrick seconded the motion. The approval was unanimous. The meeting then proceeded to approve the minutes of the February 14th meeting, with unanimous consent.

2. Pet Restraint Ordinance, Public Comments

During a meeting focused on the Pet Restraint Ordinance review, attendees were asked about their intention to speak and the chairperson expressed interest in understanding the attendees' positions on the ordinance, whether for or against changes, and planned to gauge this through a show of hands after oral comments were made. A number of citizens spoke on this topic. One citizen, speaking in favor of maintaining a specific off-leash area for dogs, highlighted the importance of such an amenity for energetic dog breeds. They shared their personal experience with their dog, emphasizing its need for exercise and its harmless nature towards birds, even during migratory seasons. The speaker advocated for the preservation of a 6/10 of a mile stretch off-leash area near the beach club at East the ocean course, arguing it was vital for dog owners and posed no environmental threat. They urged the committee to recommend the continuation of this off-leash policy to the full town council.

Alison Frey expressed concerns about the increasing difficulty of managing dogs off-leash due to the island becoming busier, citing safety concerns and past incidents, including her own dog's death from an attack. She suggested that the island is no longer the quiet place it was before 2020, highlighting the need for change. Another resident, MB, advocated for maintaining the current situation, emphasizing the community of dog owners and their adherence to rules. They suggested improving signage and possibly adjusting the leash-free zone due to habitat changes but stressed the importance of the privilege to have dogs off-leash. Rebecca Simpson pointed out the special nature of Kiawah Island and suggested focusing on renters who might not follow local rules as strictly. Another participant proposed the creation of a dog park as a solution to provide a space for dogs to run freely without affecting the beach or wildlife. The discussion reflected a range of opinions on how to balance the interests of dog owners with community safety and environmental concerns.

Becky Kranz expressed concerns about dogs chasing birds in her area, highlighting the issue occurs early in the morning and late in the evening when beach patrols are not present. She noted that some people are aware of their actions but continue regardless. Kranz also mentioned the community's division in opinions and practices, suggesting a need for better communication and cooperation. She acknowledged efforts to inform renters and the involvement of biologists in addressing the situation, emphasizing her respect for their opinions.

3. **Ordinance revisions, environmental considerations, leash regulations, wildlife protection**

The committee discussed the Pet Restraint Ordinance, focusing on creating a designated beach area for dogs and addressing concerns about environmental protection, particularly regarding birds and turtles. The conversation highlighted the need for clarity on the proposed changes and the importance of community harmony. The committee, which cannot make final decisions but recommends actions to the town council, reviewed the ordinance from an environmental perspective. A subcommittee, led by biologist Aaron Given, presented a summary of proposed changes for discussion. The goal was to reach a consensus on recommendations to the town council regarding pet restraint and environmental protection. The subcommittee, including members Lee, Stephanie, and Madeline, reviewed and proposed changes to the current ordinance to address inconsistencies and vague terms, making it more enforceable. They introduced definitions for "dawn" and "dusk" to replace specific hours for daylight-only provisions, defined "nuisance" and "under control" to clarify pet behavior expectations, and adjusted the off-leash dog area timing from November 1st to February 28th to protect the red knot, a federally threatened migratory shorebird. Additionally, they proposed reducing the maximum leash length to 16 feet to ensure better control over pets and suggested reducing the size of the dog use area on the beach to protect nesting habitats for birds. These changes aim to balance community needs with environmental conservation and wildlife protection.

4. **Committee discussion, Environmental protection, Public input, Dog access areas**

During a committee discussion, members deliberated on proposed changes affecting local environmental and recreational policies. The conversation touched on various topics, including the management of public spaces, the impact of activities on wildlife, and the balance between environmental protection and community enjoyment. A significant focus was on the regulation of dog access to certain beach areas to protect bird nesting habitats, while still providing ample space for dog owners to enjoy the beach. The committee considered public input and the need for a compromise that would address environmental concerns without overly restricting beach access for dogs. Suggestions included adjusting the designated dog-friendly areas and ensuring that any new ordinances would consider public feedback to avoid controversy. The discussion highlighted the committee's efforts to balance environmental responsibilities with community interests.

5. **Critical habitat ordinance, Dog use area, Public comments [\(00:56:43 - 01:12:02\)](#)**

The discussion then shifted to the town's critical habitat ordinance, which protects endangered species by restricting certain activities on the beach, a critical habitat for three endangered or threatened species. The current ordinance allows for adjustments based on state or federal recommendations, and a proposed change would make it easier for the town council to update restrictions as environmental conditions change. Participants also expressed concerns about pet restrictions, particularly leash requirements and access to certain areas for dog owners. The importance of educating renters and visitors about local regulations to protect wildlife was emphasized, with suggestions for improving communication through property management companies and digital platforms. The committee considered an amendment to ensure a minimum area is always available for dog use, regardless of changes in wildlife nesting areas, aiming to balance environmental protection with community access to public spaces. The meeting

concluded with a consensus on moving forward with the proposed recommendations, emphasizing the need to consider both environmental impacts and community needs in decision-making.

6. Committee discussion

One member sought clarification on the motion, highlighting that the committee had the option to table the discussion for further consideration but also had the support to proceed to a vote. Concerns were raised about the impact of flexible use areas on crowded family-friendly sections of the beach and the potential environmental impact on bird nesting sites. A suggestion was made to table the motion to incorporate more feedback and ideas, but this was ultimately voted against. The committee then proceeded to vote on the original motion, which included annual reviews and adjustments of the designated dog use area, maintaining a minimum allowance of 900 yards for dog use. The motion was approved, indicating the committee's decision to move forward with the recommendations as amended.

7. Kiawah River Bridge access study

The committee also discussed the feasibility study for Kiawah River Bridge access, deciding to table public engagement until the study's completion.

8. Beach walkovers, Dune protection, Ordinance requirements, Turtle nesting season

Amendments to the beach walkover ordinance were proposed, including the establishment of special management zones, a formal review process for walkover construction or modification, and requirements for private walkovers to extend closer to the beach with relocatable surface planking. The current ordinance requires walkovers longer than 20 ft from the active beach to be extended, and the proposal includes using relocatable planks for the last 20 ft to distribute weight and prevent dune damage. Concerns were raised about the potential for these planks to become debris in storms if not secured. The conversation also touched on the distinction between private and community walkovers, with a suggestion to possibly differentiate requirements for private walkovers on rental properties due to higher foot traffic. The cost of extending walkovers and the impact on the natural appearance of the dunes were also discussed, alongside the function of dunes in storm surge protection. The idea of encouraging, rather than legislating, homeowners to adopt measures to minimize erosion was considered, with further investigation into options suggested.

9. Environmental concerns, Dune system, Flood protection, Ordinance change

In the environmental committee meeting, discussions revolved around various environmental concerns and proposed changes to ordinances, particularly focusing on the dune system's role in flood protection and environmental impact. The committee debated the necessity and environmental impact of proposed changes, including boardwalk maintenance or extension construction, and its potential impact on the dune system. A motion was made to table the discussion for further clarification and that motion passed. Additionally, updates were provided on wildlife studies, including deer harvests, bobcat sightings, and coyote tracking, with notable movements of tagged coyotes outside the island being highlighted. The committee also discussed the installation of EV charging stations at the town hall and addressed littering and uncovered loads through proposed ordinances. The meeting concluded with project updates and plans for future discussions.

10. Invasive species management, Mosquito monitoring, Living shoreline project

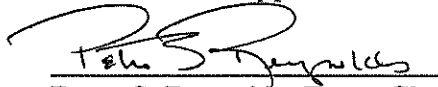
An update was provided on the invasive West Indian marsh grass found in a town pond, with the Clemson Extension Service giving the go-ahead to treat it as a documented case. Mosquito monitoring and larvicide application across the island were discussed, aiming to inhibit larval growth in storm drains. Efforts for phosphorus reduction in ponds to limit animal growth and the stocking of fish were also mentioned as part of usual operations. The resort is collaborating with the Conservancy on creating a living shoreline by installing 100 manufactured wire reefs in the Kiawah river at Mingo Point. The project aims to serve as a teachable area for the public on marsh preservation. Additional permits and a certificate of insurance from the Department of Natural Resources are awaited to proceed with the project, which also includes a significant volunteer effort for building and installing the reefs.

11. Earth Day celebration, Environmental talks, Water and soil testing, PFA (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

The meeting covered several topics related to environmental conservation and community activities. The Earth Day celebration scheduled for April 26th at Night Heron Park was discussed, highlighting tent talks, environmental organizations' participation, animal displays, a band, and a Birds of Prey flight demonstration. The Conservancy's week-long environmental talks and litter sweeps were also mentioned. A project to revisit the design with nature guidelines was outlined, focusing on organization, clarity, and completeness, and incorporating information from other entities. The document update aims to be more user-friendly with an expanded table of contents, index of terms, definitions, and hyperlinks. A native plant sale and the arrival of a fellow from Southeast Asia to work with the Conservancy were announced. The meeting also touched on water and soil testing for geoengineering compounds and PFAS, discussing costs, testing methods, and public health concerns. The possibility of offering testing services to the community and the importance of continuous water quality monitoring were discussed.

12. Motion to adjourn.

Minutes were approved at the June 11, 2024 Environmental Committee meeting.



Petra S. Reynolds, Town Clerk

6-18-2024
Date