

## Keeping Jekyll

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study cost the JIA \$149,600.

In his report to the JIA last week (August 28), James Sipes of Sand County Studios told the members several times that their biggest challenge would be retaining Jekyll's unique character and controlling development.

Carrying capacity is defined in the report as "the number of individuals who can be supported within a given area without degrading the natural, social, cultural, and economic environment for present and future generations."

Sipes estimated Jekyll has additional capacity for 650,000 to one million visitors per year. "Assuming a 2% per year increase in visitors," he said, "you could be at capacity in five to ten years."

Based on a 2017 vehicle count of 1,163,829 and using a multiplier of three persons per vehicle, a projected 3,491,487 people visited Jekyll last year.

Existing practical carrying capacity including Jekyll's buildings and sites ranges from 4.1 million to 4.5 million.

Per the study, gate traffic counts from 2013 through 2017 show a 22.3% increase over five years.

Jekyll's roads have a vehicle capacity of from less than 2,500 a day up to 8,000 per day. The Jekyll Causeway was designed to carry 18,000 to 21,000 vehicles per day. The Causeway's annual average daily traffic count was 4,270 in 2016.

Jekyll currently has 5,769 parking spaces. "I don't recommend increasing the parking spaces," Sipes said. "This will cause an increase in visitors."

Beaches are among the primary reasons people come to Jekyll Island and visitors expect that the beaches will not be overcrowded.

According to the report overcrowding could have a significant negative impact on the perceived character of the Island.

One of the best ways to limit visitation is through parking restrictions.

To maintain the character of the Island the study recommends the following beach square footage amounts per person:

- 17,906 SF for low capacity beaches (Glory Beach on the southern end and Driftwood on the northern end);

- 8,953 SF for medium capacity beaches (south Dunes beach, a stretch of northward of Oceanview Beach to the southern end of Driftwood Beach and St. Andrews on the western side); and

- 4,476 SF for high capacity beaches (from areas in front of Days Inn northward to slightly past the Westin including Great Dunes, Corsair and Oceanview beaches).

Sipes also said that while the water and sewer usage are both under capacity, there are areas of concern including the water treatment equipment which is older than its lifespan, and the pipes which are subject to failure.

The sewer's aging infrastructure is a major concern including lift stations. The areas on the island which are the oldest are also those with the most density and susceptible to future problems leaving reduced capacity. Also, 85% of the sewer pipes are clay which can leak.

A video inspection of pipe conditions was recommended.

For both water and sewer Sipes said just because Jekyll has capacity doesn't mean it should be used. "Overdevelopment would have a negative impact on the Island's character," he said.

Jekyll needs to increase revenue to be economically sustainable in a balanced manner that protects island character.

Sipes suggested there was no silver bullet to create financial self sufficiency but several small modifications done in combination to raise revenues and generate income.

- upgrade the Jekyll entrance gate system (the board approved an RFP to do just this). Increasing the fee by 5% would generate an additional \$180,000.

- charging a higher gate fee on high intensity days (which is

currently done) would add an additional \$440,000 to \$520,000 to annual revenue.

- decommission part of the golf course and redeploy part of the maintenance costs and raise greens fees (potential \$100,000 to \$150,000 per year).

- boost Convention Center revenue by increasing the number of clients who use the full array of services offered such as catering and banquet rooms (estimated \$300,000 to \$500,000 annually).

- market comparable adjustments to mini golf and bike rentals (estimated \$60,000 annually).

- increase water and wastewater fees in line with comparable utility sets which would mean a 10% to 31% increase (estimated \$100,000 to \$310,000 per year).

The plan also projects costs and priorities for the Island's upgrades.

The number one priority is infrastructure estimated to cost the JIA between \$3 million and \$5 million.

This includes a water tower, new sewer lines, lift station repairs / upgrades, potable water treatment, video inspection of sewer pipes, backup power for critical infrastructure, Variable Frequency Drives installed on all pumps, replace transite (transite is an asbestos-cement product) water pipes.

Priority #2 is to improve existing facilities including Summer Waves, Fire and EMS, campground, and

additional emphasis on the Island's character in marketing.

This cost is estimated at from \$2.5 million to \$3 million.

Priority #3 relates to the environment and conservation and includes bike path improvements, LED lighting, recycling program, an expanded ranger program, eco-friendly restoration of buildings, golf course review for potential conservation expansion, wastewater reuse for golf course irrigation.

Total estimated cost \$1.7 million to \$2 million.

Where not to develop means understanding environmental vulnerability as well as the coastal risks.

The plan's maps show the least amount of environmental risk is in the middle of the Island from east to west or where most of the development already exists.

Maps place the flood zones and sea level rise where one would expect, along the beaches and marshes.

Finally operating procedures and controls should focus on collecting additional data, improving, monitoring, developing additional management strategies and implementing strategies.

"You have done a good job in the last 10 years," Sipes told the JIA, "now you need to look at how to control growth."

The final report will be presented to the board at the October meeting.

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