



Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island

David and Mindy Egan, Co-Directors
308 Old Plantation Rd.
Jekyll Island, GA 31527
degan1@bellsouth.net
912-577-4655
www.savejekyllisland.org

Definition of Visitor Experience

What steps will be taken to gather input from Jekyll's visitors in order to determine the key components of the "user experience?" Since visitors drive Jekyll's economy, their views regarding the island's best future are vital to the findings of a capacity study. Traditionally, Jekyll's relaxed and unpretentious atmosphere, its grace and natural beauty, have been highly valued components of the user experience. We encourage you to take these aesthetic factors into full account in when evaluating the user experience.

Population Density

When defining the boundaries/acreage of the region for which population density will be measured, we encourage SCS to consider the fact that development on Jekyll is, by law, limited to 1,675 acres out of a total of roughly 5,200 acres. Including the relatively large amount of Jekyll's open land and salt marsh when calculating population density would result in an inaccurate estimate of the effects of density in the actual space where people live or stay as visitors.

Also important with respect to the density issue is the need to fully evaluate seasonal variations in population/visitation, the impact of special events--such as Shrimp & Grits, WWW, golf, tennis and soccer tournaments, triathlons, Lighting of Christmas tree, Arts Festival, Easter egg hunt-- the effect of large convention groups, and the growing number of day visitors.

What metrics will be used to establish the acceptable maximum amount of vehicular traffic on the Jekyll causeway, around the island, and on bicycle/multi-use trails?

Economics

Enhancement of revenue other than through additional residential or commercial development by way of:

- Aggressive promotion of Jekyll as a venue for bird-watching and nature photography, which are two of the most popular outdoor activities in America. For example, classes on photography, painting, and bird watching would be good additions to the existing Ranger Walks, GSTC activities and Gatorology classes. The Jacksonville Arboretum [<https://www.jacksonvillearboretum.org/news-2/>] has some very creative ideas for nature attractions, including a Plein Air Event, which was called A Brush with Nature. This year the event featured critters that can be found within the Arboretum as well as some imported ones, including a Great Horned Owl that posed for the painters. There was a

Plein Air experience for children and a tent where the painters exhibited their art for sale. Jekyll would be an ideal venue for such an event.

- Expand marketing of Jekyll's spectacular network of bicycle trails. Surprisingly, Jekyll Island is not listed on the main websites for biking enthusiasts despite the fact that Jekyll, arguably, has the best bike trails in the southeast.
- Increase the number and scope of the Plant Sales at the Jekyll Island Greenhouse. The plant sales have become very popular with the public. Thanks to the JIA's more aggressive marketing of this year's sale, the event resulted in record attendance and revenue. Fee-based classes in horticulture, native plants, herb gardens and vegetable gardens would be a nice addition to Greenhouse activities.
- Establish a Conservation Fund: Al Tate, a former ecology teacher at Fernbank Science Center and now a Jekyll resident, gave the JIA a proposal (<http://www.savejekyllisland.org/EnvTateP.html>) regarding how to bring people to the island for natural experiences. Included in his proposal was the suggestion that residents and visitors be given an easy way to contribute to a Conservation Fund that could then be used to pay for the type of ideas and activities he suggested in the proposal. Among the funding sources he suggested in this regard are: Conservation Decals that could be purchased at the Welcome Center and displayed on vehicles; a dollar amount that could be added to hotel or meal bills; contributions by hotels and businesses on the island -- participants could receive a decal or plaque to be displayed in their establishment. If appropriate, the Jekyll Island Foundation could be the entity to implement and manage the Conservation Fund. Incidentally, the Foundation was instrumental in the development of the Horton Pond project, which was, in fact, one of the ideas in Al Tate's proposal.
- Increase the JIA's share of gross sales for new residences. A decade ago, when the JIA was trying to forge a public-private partnership with Linger Longer Communities, the JIA initially rejected the financial terms of Linger Longer's partnering proposal, stating that, *"The financial return to the Jekyll Island Authority as presented in your proposal does not seem at all commensurate with the level of upfront public investment required and the long range financial benefit to Linger Longer from the development. We could not recommend the financial return to Jekyll Island Authority's Board as sound financial stewardship for the future of Jekyll Island."* As part of Linger Longer's response to this statement, the company's formerly proposed 1% of gross sales for homes and condos was doubled to 2%, which, among other concessions, helped Linger Longer win the contest to become the Authority's private partner (see http://www.savejekyllisland.org/Table_of_Financial_Terms_in_color_pdf.pdf) Although the idea of a public-private partnership with Linger Longer eventually did not work out, the fact remains that the Authority deemed the 1% share of gross sales to be insufficient, yet, surprisingly, the JIA has since accepted a 1% share for the recent residential projects at Ocean Oaks and The Cottages. By passing on the cost of the land lease to home buyers and only paying the lease for prime oceanfront land until the homes are sold, developers

end up with an inordinately large profit margin and should, therefore, be required to share at least 2% of gross sales with the JIA.

- If there is to be some new development (perhaps on the golf course), a small Retreat/Think Tank type venue in a quiet wooded area could provide an attractive alternative to the relatively expensive and formality of the Jekyll Convention Center. Small bungalows with a main meeting area as well as an outdoor meeting space could be used for retreats, small meetings and symposiums held by business groups and nonprofit organizations. (The few facilities of this type in the area are prohibitively expensive for many groups.)

A backlog of capital projects – particularly in the Historic District – has, in the past, been cited as a reason for increasing JIA revenues. However, by law, the JIA is financially responsible for day-to-day operation and maintenance of the state park but NOT capital improvements. In recent years, for example, the state has funded such capital projects as the renovation of the Pine Lakes golf course, the new Convention Center, infrastructure improvements to the island’s entryway, the new Jekyll 4-H Center (now called “Camp Jekyll”), and the Beach Village retail center, for a total of more than \$75,000,000. The state has also funded more than \$8,000,000 in renovations in Jekyll’s Historic District. When considering how JIA revenue needs inform the rationale for additional development, we urge SCS to bear in mind the costs for which the JIA is and is not responsible.

Wayfinding:

The lack of adequate signage throughout the island is an ongoing frustration for visitors.

- Driftwood Beach – Jekyll’s most talked about scenic amenity has no sign to indicate where the access points are located.
- Horton Pond - a wonderful new nature amenity - remains largely unknown because visitors have difficulty finding it due to the absence of signage. For example, a family we recently met at Horton Pond told us they drove around for half an hour with crying kids trying to find the Pond, the result being a negative effect on their visitor experience.
- Signs directing people to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center (GSTC) are scarce once visitors are within the Historic District. A sign on Pier Road at the Commissary and at the Club Hotel near the bike barn would be very helpful.
- The official JIA maps could be improved. At a board meeting a year or so ago it was mentioned that at some point a consultant would be hired to work on this issue, but, apparently, so far no progress has been made in this regard.

Parking:

- Beach Village: There was poor planning for Beach Village parking for the existing population and an increase in visitation did not seem to have been part of the parking equation despite concerns expressed at the public meetings.

- Driftwood Beach: Due to the lack of adequate parking for this attractive site, cars are parked alongside the road and on the multi-use paths, causing bikers and pedestrians to venture onto the roadway to navigate that area.
- The south end water tower and St. Andrews picnic area have inadequate parking for current visitation.
- Clam Creek: there are similar parking issues here as at Driftwood Beach. The parking lot is small and a lot of the road areas have posts to prevent parking. Where cars can be parked along the road traffic, pedestrians and bikes are dangerously close to each other.

Beach Access:

South Dunes Picnic Area, with its covered pavilions and huge oak trees, is a lovely place for family and group picnics but is underutilized as a beach venue because of the beach access ramp there is steep and difficult to navigate. If the ramp were changed by creating switchbacks, the beach would be more accessible and would be a wonderful wedding venue.

Marketing:

- The JIA should evaluate the effectiveness of its marketing philosophy and strategy of the island and elicit input from the public for this endeavor.
- For years, concerns have been expressed by the public regarding the lack of marketing for some of the island's amenities, especially golf, tennis and biking. At the 2016 public meeting for the Golf Course Study, participants encouraged the JIA to market golf more aggressively locally, with billboards, golf packages, social and print media, and on relevant websites, but, to date, little has been done in this regard.
- The JIA should provide convenient ways for visitors to give feedback regarding their experience on the island, including a display rack with comment cards at hotels, shops and JIA venues as well as a comments option on the Authority's website and social media outlets. Common questions I have seen in this regard are: *"Tell us how we are doing"* and *"Do you have a suggestion for how we can serve you better?"*

Public Safety and Welfare:

- Beach Village: JIA did not seem to adequately plan for current visitation let alone an increase in visitation. Parking and handicapped parking are inadequate. The narrowness of the road and sidewalks limit the vision of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers. Planters, trash receptacles and the pillars for the overhang make the sidewalks narrow for window shoppers, bikers and walkers. The Intersection of Main Street and Ocean Way is confusing and dangerous.
- Roundabout: The one-lane dimension of the roundabout along with the landscaping being so close to the road impedes vision for vehicles and pedestrians to see each at the intersections. JIA was advised by many during public input sessions that the roundabout should at least have a turning lane for cars exiting from the north and one for cars heading south to reduce the problem of a one-lane roundabout.

- Beachview Drive: The signs for Great Dunes Park are too close to the road, impeding vision leaving the park and driving on Beachview Drive.

The speed limit starting at the Club's Beach Pavilion should be reduced to 25mph because of vehicles turning into the pavilion, Tortuga Jack's, and Great Dunes Park and because of bikers and pedestrians crossing the road mini golf.

The bike/pedestrian crossing at mini golf is especially a problem because the roadside vegetation impedes the view of cars traveling on Beachview Drive, and if a biker or walker starts to cross the cars either have to slam on their bikes or simply, and dangerously, just keep driving. The crossing signal is a help but not sufficient.

- Historic District: The signs to keep vehicles off Pier Road and by the Morgan Center are ineffective. They say, "No motorized vehicles without authorization," but people tend to take that to mean that there is an outlet and figure they can exit the district by ignoring the sign. When they drive down these pedestrian areas, they endanger walkers and bikers and end up having to back up as much as a hundred yards to exit these dead end lanes. A second problem area is the Jekyll Island Club's bike barn, which is near the intersection of the Club and its main parking lot. Inexperienced bikers and kids take off from the bike barn, wobbling along as they encounter vehicles exiting the parking lot as well as those that fail to stop at the stop signs in that area because the signs are not the standard size and color.

- Bike Paths. There are numerous blind curves and corners due to dense vegetation. The worse areas are located at the entrance/exit of the path on the north side of the airport; the northward turn off the northernmost bike bridge; the southward turn at the southernmost bike bridge; the maritime forest/interior paths; and the path exiting Great Dunes Park that heads west toward mini golf.

The showers at the beach restrooms are too close to the bike path, causing the people lined up to use the showers to block the path. These areas get very congested in peak season. On numerous occasions, we have seen little kids run in front of bikes and into people at these sites.

The maintenance schedule needs to be expanded to take care of overhanging branches, holes, and overgrowth that make paths narrow.

The path around Tortuga Jack's is extremely dangerous (especially at the south end) because of the curves and inclines, the parking for the service area intersecting with the bike path at a turn, and pedestrian traffic to and from the restaurant crossing the bike traffic. We have seen several accidents there and have had numerous close calls ourselves.

Bikers are consistently lost at the northern end of the Historic District at the intersection with Riverview Drive/Old Plantation (west of the Fire Station) because there is no sign indicating that the bike path is on the other side of the historic cottage Villa Osipo.

Consequently, families with little kids go out on Riverview Drive to find the bike path. Thought should be given to the fact that the number of inexperienced bikers and small children continues to increase which exacerbate the above-stated problems on the bike trails.

- Beach: People often walk out on the large, perpendicular sandbar near Great Dunes Park when the tide is low. Several years ago, there were two fatalities on that sandbar, where

there are rip tides, swift currents, and a fast-rising tide. Unlike St. Simons and Tybee, Jekyll has no beach warning flags to advise bathers of surf conditions. I've been told by the JIA that liability issues exist with having warning flags, but SSI and Tybee have found a way to deal with that issue, and so have some beaches in Florida. Jekyll formerly had beach lifeguards. Currently, we have neither lifeguards nor warning flags.

- EMS services may need to be expanded. If Jekyll EMS is on a call and another call comes in for Jekyll, Brunswick EMS has to respond IF they are not occupied.
- Public restrooms are poorly ventilated, resulting in wet floors and odor issues. Inexpensive ceiling fans would help a great deal.
- Water faucets should be in all public areas. There are no drinking fountains at Clam Creek and South Dunes Picnic Areas AND at the Morgan Center.

Jekyll has always been known as a very safe place for families to vacation. In order for that to continue to be the case, issues such as the ones listed above should be a top priority. Perhaps some thought could be given to form a committee involving a board member and residents/visitors to respond to safety and public welfare issues.