Dear Mr. Royal and Mr. Hooks,

I am writing to you as chairperson of the Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island (IPJI) regarding the Jekyll Island Authority's building height guidelines, as stated on page 45 of the JIA's official Design Guidelines.

As you may know, the Authority's recent announcement that the Jekyll Westin hotel now under construction will have a maximum height of 67 feet has produced concern about building height limits along Jekyll's beachfront. I want to share those concerns with you, but before doing so I want to make clear that the views I'm expressing on behalf of IPJI should not be construed as opposition to Jekyll's convention hotel. IPJI supports that project and is not suggesting any change in the Westin's design.

With that said, I would like to respectfully request that the JIA revisit its building height guidelines, and here's why.

- One of the most endearing and popular features of Jekyll Island is its beachfront landscape, which is renowned for a natural beauty that outshines the island's built environment. Jekyll's tradition of low-rise beachfront hotels that comply with the surrounding tree canopy could be threatened if future hotels take advantage of the Authority's building height guidelines.
- The building height limit for Jekyll is 50% higher than for the rest of the Golden Isles. As stated in the Glynn County building code*, "Inasmuch as St. Simons Island and Sea Island are designated as Areas of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest, no building in Planning District 2 shall hereafter be erected, altered or moved so as to exceed forty-five (45) feet in height nor shall such building include more than four (4) stories.*" Rightly so, Jekyll is often favorably contrasted with St. Simon's Island, yet in the case of building height guidelines, scenic and historic Jekyll does not, but should, compare favorably with neighboring barrier islands.
- The maximum height of a building on Jekyll Island has been set in accord with the height of the turret at the Jekyll Island Club Hotel. That standard, which was established by a group of northeast millionaires a century ago, does not seem to be a rational one for determining what is and is not appropriate for Jekyll Island in the 21st century. Aesthetic, environmental and ecological considerations should carry more weight than a century-old and outdated tradition.
- Within the next two years, Trammell Crow is supposed submit concept plans for redeveloping the two oceanfront properties it now leases. If the JIA's building height guidelines remain the same, and if Trammell Crow takes full advantage of them, the built environment along a sizable stretch of Jekyll's beachfront would tower above the natural landscape, creating an impression that would be contrary to both Jekyll's traditional character and to the "nearest faraway place" image the JIA has rightly assigned to the island.
- There is a direct correlation between the height of a beachfront building and the possibility of 'sea turtle hatchling disorientation' caused by artificial lighting from buildings adjacent to nesting habitat. As you know, sea turtle hatchlings usually emerge from their nests at night, and, by instinct, move toward the brightest direction. On a natural beach, this direction is the light of the open horizon; on a beach lit by built structures, this direction could be landward. While certain types of lighting, such as those as required in the JIA's sea turtle lighting ordinance, can reduce the impact that artificial light can have on hatchling behavior and survival, the height of an oceanfront building, especially one that is well above the surrounding tree canopy, negatively impacts the effectiveness of protective lighting measures. For this reason, and because Jekyll is home to the renowned Georgia Sea Turtle Center, the JIA would do well to minimize the height of oceanfront buildings.

There are other points that can be made in support of limiting the height of beachfront buildings, but I hope the ones I've mentioned will be sufficient to encourage you to reconsider the JIA's building height guidelines. The decision in this regard is, of course, yours to make, as you've been entrusted with stewardship over the natural treasure that is Jekyll Island.

Respectfully,
Diane Shearer
Tucker, GA

p.s. Regarding the JIA's criticism of the statement on IPJI's Facebook page that the 5-story crane approximates the height of the Westin hotel, I believe the intent was to liken the Westin's height to the five floors visible within the six levels of the crane's tower, not the full height of the crane. In any case, the wording could have been more precise and will be amended to say that the Westin will be 67 feet tall at its maximum height and that the peak of the crane exceeds that height by 35 feet.