

Letters to the Editor Regarding the Jekyll Island Master Plan Update

The Brunswick News:

Jekyll Master Plan update must be revised

October 14, 2021

The ongoing master plan update for Jekyll Island State Park is embroiled in controversies about well-founded overdevelopment concerns.

The Jekyll Island Authority (JIA), responsible for preparing the update and getting it approved by a General Assembly oversight committee, has dodged the fundamental question about development limits, which is critical to Jekyll's character.

Key to the ambiguous language of the proposed plan update is the status of the island's golf courses, to be determined by a golf course master plan, yet to be approved. Without golf course issues being resolved, JIA seems unwilling to set limits on development, asserting it might be needed to pay for golf-course "modernization."

JIA's rationale conspicuously ignores a critically important financial fact. Although Jekyll's maintenance and daily operations must be covered by JIA revenues, major capital improvement projects typically have been funded by the state.

This distinction has crucial significance when Georgia has a \$6 billion budget surplus, partly due to federal economic recovery funds. The estimated \$18 million that's required for golf course modernization should be covered using state funds, not by sacrificing Jekyll's natural beauty with more development.

If, as discussed, a nine-hole course is used for commercial and residential development to generate income needed to pay for modernizing the remaining golf courses, Jekyll's character will be irreparably damaged. Similar concerns were expressed in thousands of public comments submitted in JIA's online-survey about the master plan.

Jekyll's master plan update must establish growth limits honoring public opinion, consistent with capacity study recommendations and the history of capital-improvement funding within Jekyll Island State Park.

David Kyler

Center for a Sustainable Coast

Jekyll Island needs a development moratorium

October 19, 2021

The question is not when but if the Jekyll Island Authority will heed the 2018 Jekyll Island Carrying Capacity Study it commissioned (which warns the island has reached its functional

capacity) and listen to visitors imploring them to put an end to development before Jekyll's uniqueness is lost.

Despite the JIA insisting in their Master Plan Update (MPU) that maintaining Jekyll's character is a primary concern, their actions say otherwise. The MPU fails to address development, particularly redevelopment of areas already designated as developed.

The prime example of this is the proposal in the Golf Course Master Plan to eliminate nine or more holes of golf to build retail space, a hotel, condos and ready for this, an assisted living facility in the state park.

If your fond memories of Jekyll are fading as each new cinderblock is laid and you want to see an end to creeping development, say yes to a moratorium on development and no to the current draft MPU by contacting the Legislative Oversight Committee (Don Hogan, our local representative, Matt Hatchett, Jon Burns, Blake Tillery, Billy Hickman and Clint Dixon), which has the authority to amend the MPU. The time to act is now.

Mindy Egan

Jekyll Island

Jekyll Island development needs to be halt

October 28, 2021

Yes, our fond memories of Jekyll Island have faded. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it trends otherwise," — written by Aldo Leopold, conservationist and environmentalist. This Georgia state park is no longer the "Golden Jewel."

The Jekyll Island Authority (JIA) has managed to attract major hotel developers to the island in return for what? Jekyll Island Authority authorized the 2018 Jekyll Island Carrying Capacity and Infrastructure Study. The report stated that the island may reach capacity on visitation by 2020 or 2021. The study further stated that any new development should emphasize the unique character of the island while minimizing impacts on culture and natural resources and to be cautious when considering any new development. Capacity should be consistent with the sustainable character of environmental systems on the island.

Jekyll's future lies where? The JIA's answer is develop more. The state government needs to invoke a moratorium on development immediately.

Furthermore, those of us that wish to preserve the beauty and integrity of our beloved Jekyll Island should contact the Legislative Oversight Committee (Don Hogan, our local representative), as well as Matt Hatchett, Jon Burns, Blake Tillery, Billy Hickman and Clint Dixon. Their emails are listed on www.legis.ga.gov. All of these individuals have the authority to amend the Master Plan Update. Do it now before it is too late.

Martha Lang

Darien

Master Plan Update won't help Jekyll overdevelopment

November 4, 2021

The forward to Jekyll Island's recently revised 2021 Master Plan Update (MPU) states that "avoiding overdevelopment" is the plan's emphasis. Nice words, but, in fact, the MPU does not deal with how to prevent overdevelopment but with how to help mitigate its effects. Skirting the issue in this way will not stop the steady slide toward overdevelopment of Jekyll Island.

If the island has indeed reached its functional capacity, as indicated by the 2018 Jekyll Island Carrying Capacity and Infrastructure Study, then the MPU should oppose further commercial and residential development of the island. Instead, the MPU merely says that the JIA "must consider" how future development might affect the island's character and that the JIA must "invite public comment and discussion of any change in land use."

"Considering" an issue is not the same thing as doing something about it. "Inviting" public comment on redevelopment is not the same as embracing it.

The most recent stimulus for public concern regarding overdevelopment is the proposed replacement of part of Jekyll's golf course complex with an assisted living facility, retail shops and a hotel. The JIA, through the MPU, should table this controversial proposal and instead formulate a detailed, forward-looking capacity plan that will impose a moratorium on development and preserve what's left of Jekyll's traditional character. The JIA's stated goal of preserving "the uncrowded and natural character encounter that sets Jekyll apart from other destinations" would clearly be best served by taking this bold and insightful step.

David Egan
Jekyll Island

JIA embraces 'build back bigger' philosophy

The number of acres eligible for new commercial and residential development on Jekyll Island is restricted, but surprisingly, there are no legal limits on redevelopment of the island. Without controls on redevelopment, the door remains open for dense, character-altering reconstruction of the island's built environment.

Simple math illustrates how a "build back bigger" philosophy has characterized Jekyll's recent redevelopment. In the past decade, 220 homes have been built on redeveloped land, increasing the total number of Jekyll residences by more than one-third. Most of these homes have been built on land that had been the site of a hotel. To compensate for this reduction in hotel room inventory, the recently built hotels are taller and have more rooms than their predecessors, and some have been built on land not previously used for hotels. For example, the site of Jekyll's former convention center is now the site of three hotels, one of which is the tallest on Georgia's coast.

Now, and for the first time, developed land designated for recreation could be redeveloped for a commercial purpose. The case at hand is Jekyll's golf course complex, part of which may be replaced with a new hotel, retail shops and an assisted living facility.

If the "build back bigger" campaign on Jekyll Island is to stop, then Jekyll's Master Plan should limit the density of new development and specify that developed land cannot be redeveloped for a different purpose. Without action, what's left of Jekyll Island's traditional character will be further degraded.

Margery Rubin
Fernandina Beach, Fl.

THE BRUNSWICK NEWS

Future development on Jekyll should be paused **November 19, 2021**

Jekyll Island State Park holds a delicate balance between nature and development that you can't help but fall in love with. On Jekyll Island residential homes, hotels and undeveloped land share space, but how much development is too much for a state park that has had over a million visitors a year.

The site where the Old Buccaneer hotel once stood could be home to a new hotel with 246 rooms, which translates into 58,360 visitors per year, or it could include 28-52 residential homes. Additionally, the draft Golf Master Plan (last discussed in October 2020) presented an idea of converting golf course lands to housing. If JIA transforms recreational lands into homes, how many more people, cars, and impact will this bring? The answer is unknown.

What is known is that the Master Plan Update grants the JIA carte blanche ability to permit more dense development throughout the "developed" areas of the state park. This glaring loophole will lead to more overcrowding and over-populating. Yet, the 2018 Capacity and Infrastructure Assessment found that, without significant changes, Jekyll Island will reach its capacity in 2021 — which is now.

We must pause future building on our Jekyll. Join me and ask Governor Kemp and the legislative oversight committee to object to the Master Plan Update. Now is the time for a temporary moratorium on development and create a capacity plan before it's too late. Sign the Petition at <https://bit.ly/3q51Xiu> today.

Susan Inman
Brunswick

Jekyll development loophole should be closed

November 19, 2021

How can there be excessive development on Jekyll Island if there's a legal limit on the number of acres that can be developed? This question may sound like a 'Zen riddle,' but the fact is the limit on the number of developable acres on Jekyll has been ineffective in preventing overdevelopment because there are no limits on how developed land can be redeveloped.

Through super-sized redevelopment projects on land that had been developed less intensely, developers, with the permission of the governor-appointed board of directors of the Jekyll Island Authority, have been able to grow Jekyll's built environment by leaps and bounds, subverting the intent of legislation designed to prevent that very thing from happening.

For example, the condo complex now under construction near the Jekyll marina is on land the JIA previously classified as 'developed' but which, in fact, had never been built upon.

The recently opened Marriott hotel has nearly double the number of rooms than the hotel that had previously occupied that site.

The 125 townhouses, called "The Cottages," have been crammed into a 10-acre site that previously housed a single hotel.

A complex of 3 hotels has been built on land where Jekyll's former convention center once sat. Now, land developed for a recreational purpose — Jekyll's golf courses — is being considered for commercial redevelopment.

Obviously, unless controls are placed on redevelopment, Jekyll's unique character will continue to suffer despite the intent of the state park's founding legislation. JIA, please close this loophole before it's too late.

Bonnie Newell
Jekyll Island

Atlanta Journal-Constitution:

Jekyll park master plan update must be revised

October 14, 2021

Jekyll Island's Master Plan Update is currently embroiled in disputes about over-development, concerns clearly emphasized in public comments.

The Jekyll Island Authority (JIA), responsible for preparing the update and getting it approved by a General Assembly oversight committee, has dodged the core question about development limits, critical to Jekyll's character.

Disturbingly, the proposed update defers development decisions to a golf-course masterplan, yet to be approved. Without golf-course issues being resolved, JIA seems unwilling to set limits on development, asserting it might be needed to pay for golf-course "modernization." JIA's rationale ignores a critically important fact: although Jekyll's maintenance and daily operations must be covered by JIA revenues, capital-improvements typically have been funded by the state.

Since Georgia has a \$6 billion budget-surplus, largely thanks to federal economic-recovery funds, the estimated \$18 million required for golf-course modernization should be covered using state funds, not by sacrificing Jekyll's natural beauty with more development.

David Kyler

Center for a Sustainable Coast