

The Jekyll Island State Park Authority (JIA) and Committees met in Public Session on Tuesday, November 17, 2020 in the Jekyll Island Convention Center and broadcasted to the public via YouTube.

Members Present: Mr. Joseph B. Wilkinson, Jr., Chairman  
Mr. Bob Krueger, Vice Chairman  
Mr. Bill Gross, Secretary/Treasurer  
Mr. Trip Tollison  
Ms. Joy Burch-Meeks  
Dr. Buster Evans  
Mr. Dale Atkins

Members Absent: Commissioner Mark Williams  
Mr. Glen Willard

Key Staff Present: Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation  
Jones Hooks, Executive Director  
Noel Jensen, Chief Operations Officer  
Kevin Udell, Senior Sales Manager  
Andrea Maroquin, Museum Curator  
Maria Humphrey, Lease Manager  
Melissa Cruthirds, General Counsel  
Michelle Webb, Executive Assistant

Various members of the public, JIA staff, and press were present and listened live via broadcast on YouTube.

Chairman Wilkinson called the committee sessions to order at approximately 9:32 a.m. and introduced those participating via teleconference. The roll was called, and all members were present except Mr. Glen Willard and Commissioner Mark Williams.

## **I. Historic Preservation/Conservation Committee**

A. Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation introduced the report Environmental Stressor and Priority Plant Communities on Jekyll Island. He started by reviewing the history of the study. This research started five years ago when the RFP was issued. The concern was that the white-tailed deer population on the island may have been affecting rare and keystone plant species on Jekyll Island. However, the RFP was issued in such a way to avoid a myopic focus and a single stressor, such as the deer. The RFP was designed to look at the ecosystem as a whole - looking at such factors as climate change, hydrologic changes, invasive plants, and human activity that may have an effect on plant populations. This RFP was awarded to Dr. Elizabeth King of the University of Georgia and her team who have been presenting annually to the board about their findings. The full seven reports produced from this report will be available on the website soon.

Dr. King presented an update of the Environmental Stressor and Priority Plant Communities on Jekyll Island. First, she introduced her collaborators and team then outlined her presentation which included: Jekyll's Treasured Forests, Objectives and Scope, Seven Research Studies, Recommendations and Support, and Expanding Impacts.

This research studied the multiple stressors for young live oaks, not only on Jekyll Island, but several other coastal Georgia Islands. The Objectives and Scope of this research

included: storm damage, deer, herbivory, seedling damage, social values of live oaks, restoration planning, management objectives, soil moisture, and Laurel Oaks. Dr. King then went into detail of each research area and ended her presentation discussing the expanding impacts, future research, and the possibility for active management to encourage Live Oaks.

Board members had a number of questions.

Mr. Krueger asked about the impact browsing of the deer on the variety of plant life in the understory of the forest. Dr. King stated that herbivory was an important natural part of this ecosystem, however, too much or too little are both problematic.

Dr. Evans stated he was not surprised that the research found that Live Oaks were so important to residents and visitors. However, he then asked a two-part question. First, why did the UGA team choose to focus on Live Oaks as opposed to the larger plant community and second, what plants did Dr. King recommend to draw deer to locations for view or other purposes? Dr. King, as a vegetation ecologist, not a wildlife ecologist, was not able to make specific plant recommendations to draw deer. However, for the first part of the question, she talked about both the cultural and environmental significance of Live Oaks and the role they play in the ecosystem. She stated her research is the first to look at the decreasing Live Oak population on the Georgia coast.

Mr. Krueger asked Dr. King to describe some of the differences between the ecology/plant community of Jekyll and other coastal barrier islands. Dr. King responded there was a lot more of the understory vegetation on Jekyll than other islands. She also saw more Saw Palmetto understory due possibly to fire prevention. Also, the lack of wild hogs, the presence of residential backyards, and golf courses contribute to the uniqueness of Jekyll as compared to the other barrier island she had studied. Additionally, Jekyll is lower lying than other neighboring islands she has worked on with higher central ridges.

Dr. Evans asked following the reports' recommendations, what improvements to herd health and herd carrying capacity might be? Dr. King stated the recommendations in her studies involved excluding deer on a very small scale, not trying to manipulate a whole deer population. Whether manipulating the whole deer population was in Jekyll's interests was beyond the scope of the research.

Mr. Krueger asked about the balance between plant ecology, deer populations, and carnivore populations. Dr. King stated that while wildlife management decisions influence vegetation, the research had not seen a strong signal of deer impacts on Live Oaks in particular over the study's time. She encourages that if wildlife management is implemented, then vegetative impact be studied and monitored.

There were no public comments.

## **II. Finance Committee**

A. Mr. Bill Gross, Finance Committee Chair, reviewed the October financials as included in the Board materials. Parking revenues and traffic counts continued to gain. While the Convention Center was still experiencing losses, there were finally some revenues and rentals this month. Net operating cash was above both budget and year to date. Hotel revenues and occupancies were down from last year's numbers.

B. Mr. Hooks then introduced the request for ratification of financial expenditure for additional bike path rehabilitation. The contractor, Landscapes Unlimited, informed the Jekyll Island Authority of a 900 linear feet credit due to the inclusion of driveways in the

original GIS calculations. Due to the early announcement of this credit, the Jekyll Island Authority could also pave section B1 of the map for an investment of only \$60,380. This would be a significant cost savings due to lack of mobilization costs for the already working contractor. Due to the extremely short time to keep the mobilization, this request was a ratification request to the Board. However, before the B1 addition was approved, individual Board members were polled.

Mr. Gross felt that Mr. Hooks and his staff had done a wonderful job.

The motion to recommend approval of the ratification for the additional bike path rehabilitation was made by Mr. Krueger. The motion was seconded by Dr. Evans. The motion was unanimously approved.

C. Mr. Noel Jensen presented the capital request for the emergency repair and ratification of fire hydrant rehabilitation expenditure. As during recent routine testing it was found that four of Jekyll's 144 fire hydrants had failed since the last inspection. Three of the failed fire hydrants were in the Historic District and one was adjacent to the JIA fuel pump island. Materials purchased were used to build the replacements in-house at the JIA Water/Wastewater Department. The lowest bid received was for \$6,336.12 from Core and Main Supplies of Savannah, GA. Purchasing four hydrants will keep two spare hydrants in in reserve. Staff recommend the ratification of capital funds to be paid from reserves for these repairs.

Mr. Wilkinson noted for the record this was an emergency repair. The motion to recommend approval of the capital request for emergency repair and ratification of fire hydrant rehabilitation expenditure was made by Dr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Krueger. The motion was unanimously approved.

There were no public comments.

### **III. Human Resources Committee**

A. There was no report.

### **IV. Marketing Committee**

A. Mr. Udell, Senior Sales Manager presented the report from the Sales Department which included the snapshot of COVID impact on group business and continued COVID challenges nearby at the Amelia Island Omni. Looking ahead, Mr. Udell stated that over 90% of groups who cancelled have been re-booked. The Sales Department was on pace for future bookings. Next, he discussed outreach to planners and influencers including motorcoach business and a new motorcoach website landing page. He also highlighted the progress in key segments, smaller groups, and quick moving groups. Finally, he announced that Maria Trammel, the Atlanta member of the Sales team, was awarded the Georgia Society of Association Executives Peggy Seigler Corporate Member the Year award.

Ms. Joy Burch-Meeks stated that this month's report highlighted business groups and the strong relationships Jekyll has in the travel industry. She gave kudos to the Marketing team.

There were no further questions from the board and there were no public comments.

## **V. Legislative Committee**

Mr. Tollison reported that he was working to schedule an appointment with the Governor to try to discuss funding within the Governor's budget for the campground extension and public safety complex projects.

There were no public comments.

## **VI. Committee of the Whole**

Upon opening the Committee of the Whole, Chairman Wilkinson announced that Mr. Hooks had received an Honorary Life Member award from the Georgia Economic Development Association the previous day in Atlanta. He congratulated Mr. Hooks for the award.

A. Mr. Hooks discussed the golf master plan insights for consideration and the next steps for the Jekyll Island Authority. Mr. Hooks stated that as there was no defined budget or timeline with this project, therefore the Board had time to deliberate on the next steps to take. Displayed on the PowerPoint was an updated copy of the next steps Mr. Hooks had discussed at the previous JIA Board meeting. He then introduced Mr. Ken Bleakly to discuss the economic feasibility of possible Golf Master Plan implementations.

- Mr. Ken Bleakly of Bleakly Consulting presented his Golf Master Plan Economic Feasibility Study, which was included in the meeting documents. Mr. Bleakly's extensive financial analysis of the proposed Vincent Group Golf Master Plan included: an introduction and summary, Jekyll Golf operations, development possibilities for surplus land, direct and indirect revenue impacts, financing options, and an appendix.

The Bleakly analysis highlighted, the overall impact from the Vincent Golf Master Plan, the total economic impact of implementation of the Vincent design, the return on investment JIA could expect from golf course renovations, an outline of development options for surplus gold land, and a list of possible financing options for implementation.

Mr. Bleakly discussed declining rounds of play, the changes in the number of rounds played on Jekyll, and the financial operational performance deficits at the JIA Golf courses.

Mr. Bleakly then examined Vincent Golf Master Plan recommendations. These included the cost to upgrade existing facilities, the estimated cost of implementation of the proposed plan, and he reviewed the Vincent Design maps.

The development options for surplus land were then considered by reviewing the proposed master plan development sites, detailing three different possible development options, and comparing revenue projections of three proposed options. Mr. Bleakly completed this section of his analysis by highlighting Vincent photos of possible concepts of the lodge and golf cottages, assisted living community, retail, as well as single-family cottages possibilities.

The next section detailed direct and indirect revenue impacts, the overall economic impacts, the total economic impact of renovations to JIA, and JIA's possible return on investment for renovations.

Mr. Bleakly then reviewed possible financing options for implementation of the Vincent Golf Master Plan and other potential financing sources that may close the gap as a source of funds for repayment.

Finally, Mr. Bleakly reviewed the appendix which included graphs of option 1-3 of projected JIA revenues from the different levels of development. In conclusion, he discussed attracting possible grant and foundation support.

Following Mr. Bleakly's presentation, Dr. Evans commented that while everyone agreed that adjustments to golf need to be made, he had concerns about the amount of density advocated by Mr. Bleakly. First, Dr. Evans confirmed that not all of Mr. Bleakly's recommendations from the Vincent Design had been adopted. Second, Dr. Evans had personal concerns that adoption of any development beyond the Vincent Design recommendations may be pushing the envelope. Third, Dr. Evans stated his unease about adding additional retail. He would like to see market studies regarding what types of business would be needed to create a symbiotic, not competitive relationship with Jekyll Island's already established retail businesses.

Mr. Krueger stated that he agreed with Dr. Evans' concerns and these issues should be Board discussions. However, he felt that the presentation was for consideration of possible actions to take. He felt the Board was not yet at a decision point, that the presentation was just additional information for consideration.

Ms. Burch-Meeks concurred with Mr. Krueger, but asked Mr. Hooks what the next steps were.

Mr. Hooks first confirmed Dr. Evans was correct, there had been no adoption of the Vincent Design Master Plan to date. The presentation today from Mr. Bleakly was intended as information to consider. Mr. Hooks outlined the next steps may include time to understand the JIA Golf Course maintenance issues, a more detailed examination of the individual components, and various other detailed issues. He thanked Mr. Bleakly for presenting options, some easy and some difficult. He agreed that there is a serious need to retain a balance between golf course improvements and the unique nature of Jekyll. He will be working with the Chairman to schedule further work session to examine some of the issues in greater detail.

B. Ms. Andrea Marroquin, Museum Curator presented the consideration of awarding Request for Proposal (RFP) #359, Proposal for Exhibit Concept Design Plan for Hollybourne Cottage. In February the JIA Board approved the release of RFP #359 to design an exhibit concept design plan for Hollybourne Cottage. A total of 14 bids were received and the top six candidates presented to the Review Committee on October 28, 2020. HW Exhibits of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina emerged as the apparent finalist. This RFP, if awarded, would be scheduled for 20 weeks at a cost of \$56,520.49, which falls within the previously budgeted amount. Ms. Marroquin presented some background about HW Exhibits and their partners on this project.

Mr. Krueger moved to recommend the award of Request for Proposal (RFP) #359, Proposal for Exhibit Concept Design Plan for Hollybourne Cottage, as recommended by staff. The motion was seconded by Ms. Burch-Meeks. It was noted for the record that Mr. Tollison was no longer participating in the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved by those members present.

C. Ms. Maria Humphrey, Lease Manager reviewed the proposed Pier Road Lease Renewals. She presented the highlights of a memo included in the meeting documents which outlined a proposed rent increase and language updating of leases that had not been reviewed in some time. The new updated leases had been reviewed by the lessees, and staff recommended approval. Dr. Evans moved to approve the listed Pier Road Lease Renewals, as recommended by staff. Mr. Krueger seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

D. Mr. Hooks gave the Executive Director's Report. He noted that Board members had received a copy of the proposed 2021 board meeting dates as well as copy of the Georgia Department of Transportation airport economic impact analysis. He remarked that the airport report was prepared using data from 2019. This data did not reflect neither the impact of the pandemic nor the new fuel service at the Jekyll airport. Nevertheless, the report cited the annual economic impact from the airport to be \$2.687 million dollars.

Mr. Hooks updated the Board that the parcel next to the Courtyard/Residence Inn was the last parcel of the original revitalization effort remaining. The ground lease for this parcel with LNWA requires a marketing analysis. Mr. Hooks recently confirmed with Mr. Dave Curtis that LNWA has begun to the process of receiving market study proposals. No Board action was required.

He reminded Board members that a Board tour of the Courtyard/Residence Inn would immediately follow the meeting.

The Paulk Cup golf tournament was a success. This inaugural tournament was the first JIA sponsored tournament for which 100% of the proceeds would go to the Jekyll Island Foundation. The Paulk family was pleased, and Mr. Hooks applauded Mr. Spencer Brookman, Director of Golf and his team for their work.

Mr. Hooks reported the State of Georgia Historic Preservation Director, Dr. Crass, was scheduled to meet with Mr. Hooks and Mr. Michael Scott, the new Director of Historic Resources today in Jekyll's historic district.

Furthermore, Mr. Hooks announced the Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Gross had been re-appointed by the Governor. Due to the pandemic, a ceremonial swearing in would be scheduled for a later date. He congratulated Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Gross.

Finally, Mr. Hooks updated the Board members on the JIA ransomware attack. He encouraged people who would like to know more information to visit the JIA website. He was pleased to report that as of that week, approximately 7,000 letters were being delivered to last known addresses for people who may have been affected by the breach. The call center for potentially impacted individuals was operational.

E. Mr. Wilkinson stated in the Chairman's Comments how thankful he was for the remarkable staff.

There was one public comment. Ms. Beverly Hopkins thanked the Board and staff for the bike path improvements. She also thanked the Board for continuing to broadcast online. She expressed a desire for about the public comments to appear online for later review. Additionally, she agreed with Dr. Evans comments about the Golf Master Plan and further development.

The Board moved directly into the Board Meeting Agenda.

The Jekyll Island State Park Authority (JIA) Board Meeting  
November 17, 2020

After clarifying voting procedure and identifying those members participating by telephone, Chairman Wilkinson opened the JIA Board Meeting and announced there was still a quorum.

1. Mr. Krueger moved to accept the minutes of the October 20, 2020 Board Meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gross. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved unanimously with no objections.
2. Approval of the request for ratification of financial expenditure for additional bike path rehabilitation, a recommendation from the Finance Committee, was adopted unanimously.
3. Approval of the capital request for emergency repair and ratification of fire hydrant rehabilitation expenditure, a recommendation from the Finance Committee, was adopted unanimously with no objection.
4. Approval of the award for Request for Proposal (RFP) #359, Proposal for Exhibit Concept Design Plan for Hollybourne Cottage, a recommendation from the Committee of the Whole, was adopted unanimously with no objection.
5. Approval of Pier Road lease renewals, a recommendation from the Committee of the Whole, was adopted unanimously with no objection.

The motion to adjourn was made by Dr. Evans. There was no objection to the motion and the meeting adjourned at 12:14 p.m.

A Board and media tour of the Courtyard by Marriott and Residence Inn Jekyll Island Construction Site followed the meeting.