

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING
Kiawah Island Municipal Center
Council Chambers
April 17, 2018; 2:00 PM

Minutes

I. **Call to Order:** Mr. Jordan called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

II. **Roll Call:**

PRESENT: Jim Jordan, Chairman
Jim Chitwood
Jim Sullivan
Lynne Sager
Jane Ellis
Lynette Schroeder
John Leffler
Michael Guniczak
Pam Wilson

KINHC: Justin Core
Jack Kotz

KICA: Matt Hill

ARB: Sara Senst

KIGR: Liz King

TOKI: Aaron Given

ABSENT: Scott Nelson
Beverly Gholson

ALSO PRESENT: Diana Mezzanotte, Council Liaison
Stephanie Tillerson, Town Administrator

III. **New Business**

A. Environmental Funding Requests (FY 2018-19)

Mr. Jordan stated that in preparation for the Town's Fiscal Year 2018-2019 budget the Environmental Committee would need to make a recommendation on those projects it supports for funding.

1. Kiawah Conservancy

Ms. Windham, Executive Director of the Kiawah Conservancy, gave a detailed review of each of the funding requests submitted by the Conservancy and responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

- (1) **\$12,500** for one issue of *Naturally Kiawah* dedicated to sea level rise. Issues of the magazine are distributed to property owners and used by many rental and property managers to provide guests with environmental education. More than 6,000 are printed for distribution free of charge.
- (2) **\$60,000** for the development of a new film on dolphin strand feeding. This is one of the most popular attractions to Kiawah guests and homeowners. Observing this

feeding is both difficult and discouraged. A film developed especially for Kiawah, and our guests would be an ideal educational tool for the Town, Resort, rental providers and the Conservancy.

- (3) **\$12,000** for Symposium on Bobcats. An annual event (February 2019) that is open to the public. Guests and property owners are invited to attend this subject driven presentation. More than 180 people sign up for the free event.
- (4) **\$10,000** for new signage on the Kiawah Island Parkway for educational information. These interpretative signs will offer guests information about habitats and environmental opportunities as they walk or ride bikes to Freshfields Village. Hundreds of guests use the parkway bike path each year. Signs for the recently established conservation areas adjacent to the parkway are currently being designed by KICA's sign designer. Additional areas of interest, such as wading birds, unique wildlife habitats, and nesting/resting areas will be highlighted for the public.
- (5) **\$8,000** 2019 Earth Day: speakers, educational materials and an expanded version of what we have offered to date. Our goal is to have 500 guests attend the event next year.
- (6) **\$10,000** Plastics Committee. The Conservancy has been charged to bring awareness and develop a plan for Kiawah to become a community that is single-use plastic free. The committee needs funding for reusable bags and to assist them in creating an island-wide awareness campaign.
- (7) **\$10,000** to support Conservation Matters. Bringing in educational speakers for a variety of environmental issues - including but not limited to sea level rise, plastic-free communities - how communities can become eco-friendly. These programs are offered to the public free of charge.
- (8) **\$7,500** Existing Video clips (35) to be re-mastered for educational outreach and mass communication across all social media platforms. This will utilize the existing nature films and prepare them for wide use in our community by all island entities.
- (9) **\$1,500** TravelStorys App Plugin. The desktop plugin for the TravelStorys app allows visitors to the Conservancy's website to view the current inventory of "Naturally Kiawah" Pathways tours across Kiawah Island. The app is used by a wide variety of Kiawah residents and guests to learn more about the Island and its natural history. The developer of the app is willing to provide a discount to help match the costs of the plugin.

Total \$ 131,500

Discussion included if the lack of environmental funding requests was due to the tourism aspect required by funding from accommodations tax funds (ATAX), and if the Conservancy submitted a report which outlines how the funds from the current funding had been spent. Mr. Jordan clarified that the report would be completed at the end of the current fiscal year.

Members engaged in an in-depth discussion of the proposed sea level rise issue of *Naturally Kiawah* magazine, which may also include other pertinent issues. Additional conversation included if funding of Conservancy films and symposiums projects would fit within the "head in beds" or advertising and promotion of tourism guidelines of ATAX. The funding for the Plastics Committee was withdrawn by Mrs. Windham.

Members discussed if the Conservancy is involved in the Turtle Patrol funding and if the development of a new film on dolphin strand feeding could inadvertently cause more tourist to harass the dolphins and if it, as an education tool, would fall under the ATAX guidelines. The suggestion was made to better organize requests into what can and cannot be funded by ATAX funds.

Committee members were charged with ranking the projects from the most favorite to least favorite in funding rather than focusing on the funding amounts.

2. Outdoor Wildlife Lessons in Science (OWLS)

Project: Outdoor Wildlife Lessons in Science (OWLS) Outreach Program

St. John's High School and the Kiawah Island Nature program have partnered together to create an outdoor education outreach program called OWLS (Outdoor Wildlife Lessons in Science). The primary goals of this program are to 1) connect local high school students with their local habitats, 2) offer local high school students additional outlets in which to learn science, and 3) instill local high school students with a respect for and responsibility of their local environment. Offering local students opportunities to learn in and connect with local ecosystems benefits everyone. The student has additional resources for learning science, local teachers and schools are supported by their community, and the community engenders environmentally conscientious youth that will invest in their home islands. The first year of OWLS is almost over (May 2018) and has been a huge success. Funds are needed to continue the project into its second year.

Funding will be used to secure transportation for students, provide lunches during the hours-long field trips, and supply items to be used during the program, including, but are not limited to, "nature jars" for collecting samples from nature, salinity probes, dissolved oxygen probes, writing utensils, small notebooks, thermometers, soil testing kits, etc. This project meets the third goal and its objectives of the Town of Kiawah Island's 2015 Comprehensive Plan.

The program will help students' academic careers in STEM content areas while introducing them to their habitat. They will contribute to the OWLS blog to update local community members and visitors of the program's progress and activities and assess student progress. Ultimately, students may develop a love of their local habitat and science, thereby better preparing them to enter the workforce and boost our local or national economy while potentially engendering conservation-minded youth who will help protect our habitats.

Requested Amount: \$2,500

Discussion included the success of the program over the past year which included bringing 30 high school students to the island to work with Naturalists for three sessions per semester. This year's program resulted in two students entering into an internship with the Nature Center. This program would be funded out of the educational and outreach line item.

Committee members agreed on recommending the funding of the project for a second year.

3. Dolphin Research and Education

Project: Atlantic Bottlenose dolphin strand feeding at Captain Sam's Inlet- Education and Outreach.

"Strand feeding" is a unique hunting behavior in which bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) work together in small groups to herd fish towards the shore. They then use a powerful wave to push the fish onto the shore and then lunge onto the shore to grab the fish. Giving the dolphins their space while strand feeding is important to ensure they are not harassed, and this specialized hunting strategy is not disrupted. Each year, NOAA Fisheries receives reports of people trying to illegally interact with (touch, chase, or swim with) or even hand feed the dolphins as they strand on the beaches of Kiawah Island, South Carolina; these

interactions are violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The purpose of this project is to reduce disturbance to strand feeding dolphins and minimize violations of the MMPA, as well as better understand the local dolphin population and this feeding strategy. Components of this project include community outreach on/near the beaches where dolphins are known to strand feed, as well as the distribution of outreach materials throughout the Kiawah Island Community. Also, data will be collected to help biologists better understand this unique strand feeding behavior (i.e., frequency, number of dolphins, photo documentation).

Kiawah Island is one of a few locations in the US that dolphins are known to strand feed. Disturbing the animals can disrupt their behaviors and could result in changes or abandonment of this foraging behavior. Strand feeding can be observed from shore, kayaks, and boats, and has become somewhat of a spectacle to onlookers.

This project aims to increase awareness of the importance of maintaining a distance from strand feeding dolphins and how to responsibly view them without causing harassment during important foraging activities, thus, preserving this extremely unique viewing experience and allow for Kiawah Island to become leaders in this conservation effort. Identifying feeding hotspots will allow us to focus conservation efforts on those areas as well as understand the impacts on individual strand feeders if these habitats are lost or if the behavior is abandoned. Implementation of an educational program will involve monitoring on the beach during peak times for strand feeding to observe and record dolphin behavior and engage the public about maintaining a safe viewing distance. Educational materials will be available and provided to local residents and businesses both directly and at local events on Kiawah. The project team will establish relationships with the Town of Kiawah to better understand the value of this behavior to the community while working together towards the conservation of a rare and unique behavior.

This project has seen direct benefits from the on-site educators. We have seen fewer human interactions when educators are present, and there has been a reduction in harassment reports filed.

The dolphin data has also been very useful in understanding the dolphin's use of the inlet. Twelve individual dolphins have been positively identified as "strand feeders" frequently visiting the inlet for food. Several of these animals have sighting histories over 20 years long. We have also observed a mother teaching her young to strand feed, resting animals, and mating in the inlet leading us to believe the inlet is an important area for the dolphin's home range. We cannot stress enough the importance of the inlet to this portion of the Charleston dolphin population for several behaviors and hope Kiawah continues to support the efforts to protect this area from harassment.

Requested Total: 9,313.00

Discussion included the importance of the program and the data that is collected as part of the program, the potential that continual harassment could eliminate the eleven dolphins that are strand feeding in Captain Sam's Spit, evaluation of the effectiveness of the program, along with the coordination of the funding with the program recently established on Seabrook, and if the program can be taken over by the Town in the future.

Committee members recommended funding the project for an additional year.

IV. Citizen Comments:

None

V. Chairman's Comments:

None

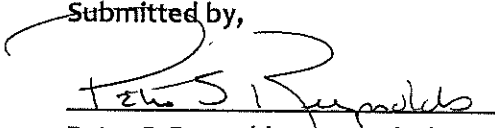
VI. Committee Member Comments:

None

VII. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:09 pm.

Submitted by,



Petra S. Reynolds, Town Clerk

Approved by,



Jim Jordan, Chairman

7-16-18

Date