

**Long Range Planning Committee
Communication Issues
Kiawah Island Community Association**

Date of Report:	June 30, 1999
From:	Fred Peterson, Ron Ritchie, Jackie Walters and Ann Welsh
Re:	Activity Report and Recommendations
Meeting Dates:	4/29/99; 5/4/99; 5/13/99; 5/19/99; 6/1/99; 6/16/99

Introduction

We were asked to present "optional solutions" to the following question: **How can the existing community association publications become more effective modes of communication to the membership?** After a brief presentation of the process we followed in addressing this issue, we report our recommendations. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussion and hope that you will find our thoughts useful.

Process

Each subcommittee member examined the focus group reports provided by Dr. Musharn. These reports had helped to establish the context in which our assigned question was generated. At our initial meeting, we defined a series of questions to guide our inquiry. These questions revolved around the mission, editorial policies, content, format and timing of the KICA Digest. We also agreed to a plan of operation that involved consultation with individuals involved in the publication of both the KICA Digest and the KICA web site. [The subcommittee felt that it was premature to assess the web page given the low usage by the membership to date, although we offer a few suggestions below.)

Meetings were then conducted with the knowledgeable individuals identified in our initial meeting.

May 4, 1999:	Tammy McAdory [for her expertise regarding KICA administration as well as publication of the Digest and web site]
May 13, 1999:	Tom McAndrews [as a representative of the Communications Advisory Board [CAB] when we were unable to meet with current CAB chair Marianne Mead]
May 19, 1999:	Tom Nelson [editor of the Kiawah Island Talk.]
June 16, 1999:	Vaughan Delk and Townsend Clarkson [KICA Board of Directors; members of subcommittee approving Digest content]

These individuals were extremely helpful and we thank them for their assistance.

Using all the information generated, we began to discuss potential "optional solutions:" We worked from a simple premise. Communication problems are not solved by less communication but rather by **improved** communication. We believe that the KICA membership should feel as well [or better] served by the Digest as town residents by Town Notes or KPOG members by the Talk. The best solution to "competing" with other island publications for the "hearts and minds of property owners" is to provide readers with the most comprehensive and detailed information on

issues of interest and importance to members of the community association.

This led us to examine the criticisms leveled at the KICA Digest. Perusal of the "whitebook" as well as our meetings suggested discontent with respect to the mission [e.g., serves interests of developer rather than the membership], content [e.g., neither timely nor newsworthy], format [e.g., hard to read] and cost [e.g., green ink, paper quality] of the publication. It is important to recognize, however, that some or all of these same criticisms could be [and are] leveled at any publication. Thus it became important for us to distill these criticisms into something that could be made useful to the members of the Communications Advisory Board and the KICA Board of Directors.

Fundamentally, the problem is one of credibility. Solve this problem and the others will follow. It is important to note, however, that credibility always lies in the eye of the beholder - 0 truth is partial. Why is this so important? Because if the aim of this or any committee is to reduce diversity of opinion, or to sugarcoat differences so that they appear less real or less of a problem, it will fail. Rather the approach must be to build consensus around a set of truths that reflect the demographic, experiential, social, and political differences that are a natural accompaniment to growth.

Optional Solutions re: KICA Digest

We identified three optional solutions to the problem of increasing the effectiveness of the KICA Digest. We do not believe that these options are equally useful. Indeed, the subcommittee endorses only the third option, to continue publishing the Digest after incorporating a series of recommended changes. We briefly detail each of these options:

I. Continue to publish the KICA Digest "as is."

Obviously, this is the easiest course to follow. Pursuing this alternative, however, would be unwise. Communication emerged as one of the major issues of the focus groups and the Digest was specifically mentioned as a candidate for improvement. To leave it unchanged, then, would carry the appearance [if not the reality] of non-responsiveness. As a consequence, it would likely exacerbate the existing credibility problems. Most importantly, this would represent a lost opportunity to contribute to community building on Kiawah. We strongly urge against this alternative.

II. Discontinue KICA Digest.

The KICA Digest's role as the only publication reaching all property owners makes this alternative unattractive. A critical component of community building is effective communication [see the report of the LRP Subcommittee on Community Building]. If we are to achieve the promise envisioned by Joe Bunting at the annual meeting, then the Community Association needs a vital and credible means of communicating with the membership. The web page is a vehicle for communication but until 100 percent of the membership is 'internet-ready' it will not be an acceptable substitute for the Digest. People may choose not to read the Digest but they must be able to receive it. [Technology does provide some interesting communication options for the future but is outside the scope of our charge]. The subcommittee does not believe that discontinuing publication of the Digest serves the best interests of the membership.

III. Publish a "new and substantially improved" KICA Digest.

This solution would demonstrate the KICA Board's recognition of existing communication problems as well as their commitment to improving the situation. It would contribute to the ongoing process of community building in a variety of ways. First, it could provide all members of the association with timely and accurate information. [Again we underscore the Digest's importance as the only publication reaching all property owners.] Second, it could introduce the membership to the challenges and rewards of working toward a community whose strength and resilience equals the natural splendor of this island. Third, an improved Digest could serve as the basis for meaningful interaction among all KICA stakeholders. Finally, It would provide a standard for civil and candid discourse that will support and encourage the widest possible citizen involvement in carrying out the strategic and operational responsibilities of our community association. This option has the unanimous support of this subcommittee.

How to achieve the "new and improved" KICA Digest? A question we asked repeatedly was, "What it would take to make you want to read the KICA Digest?" We repeatedly received the same response - improve its credibility. This lead to the follow-up question, "What would it take to improve credibility?" To this question we received a greater variety of responses but basically they all revolved around increasing the coverage and candor of the Digest's content. Valid or not, the perception that the Digest is promotional tool and shuns controversy is widespread. There is no quick fix to this problem - indeed, changes in perceptions tend to occur slowly. Nevertheless, no changes will occur unless evidence of a changed Digest is presented. The best way to shape perceptions is to address - openly, systematically and repeatedly - each criticism made of the Digest.

We offer the following suggestions:

I - Mission: A mission statement for the KICA Digest should be developed and published in every edition.

We believe that the beginnings of a mission statement for the KICA Digest is contained in the committee charter for the CAC, namely,

To oversee the publication of a KICA-sponsored newsletter, published no less than 10 times annually, providing clear, concise, objective, non-partisan and non-personal reports of KICA meetings, as well as majorities of Island concern and interest, to 0 property owners. This publication should strive to become the primary source of dependable and unbiased information and dialogue about Kiawah Island for property owners. The KICA Board Operations Committee has approval over the contents of the Digest. Notice of approval/disapproval will be provided within 24 hours of receipt of written material. Any board member disagreeing with an item addressed in the Digest has the right to publish a dissenting opinion in the next issue of the Digest.

[Source: 4.21.99 version of KICA Board's Charter and Assignment to the communications Advisory Board]

Some revision of this mission statement will be necessary to meet the credibility needs of the new Digest. The refinement of the mission would help the Board clarify its goals for the Digest. It would also help clarify expectations so that the Communications Advisory board can better perform its tasks. Communication of this mission in each Digest would then inform the membership. Further, the mission would then be available to serve as a standard against which the content and format of the Digest may be judged. The members of the community association are intelligent and well able to make accurate judgments regarding the credibility of information if they know the purpose behind the publication.

2. Editorial policy: An editor for the Digest should be identified, a statement of editorial policy should be published in every edition. Further, editorial policy should encourage and provide for the publication of letters to the editor.

The absence of an editor as well as the presence of the layered process of editorial control serves only to encourage accusations of bias. We strongly encourage the identification of an individual to serve as "editor." We are not suggesting that KICA hire an editor. Rather, we are suggesting that it should be clear who is responsible for content and to whom letters regarding that content should be directed. The obvious choice for editor would be the chairperson of the Communications Advisory Board. Further, there should be a clearly identified policy regarding the publication of letters to the editor submitted by members of the Community Association in subsequent issues of the Digest. This would be in addition to any dissenting articles provided by a Board member.

[Incidentally, this would challenge the Talk to a similar formulation and dissemination of mission/editorial policy!].

3. Content: The content of the KICA Digest should be expanded beyond reports of community Association activities to include articles on issues of importance to property owners. "Issues of importance" should be broadly defined to include any issue that may exert influence on the lives of property owners.

Issues of content follow naturally from the statement of mission. If the mission of the Digest is to serve the needs of the membership [as well as the Board's primary means of communication with the membership], then a diverse body of content is desirable. As the KICA Board members suggested, content that is interesting and that concerns people's lives as well as property values should be included. In other words, issues that concern not just what is happening on the island but also issues that will effect people living on [or owning property on] the island. This would necessarily include issues about the developer, the Town, the Resort, Charleston County, etc. Examples of possible content generated in our meeting with those Board members included: Renovations at the Sandcastle, actions concerning the development of the Andell property, Johns Island Expressway, real estate tax assessment, safety information. Finally, the levels of oversight are unwieldy, delaying publication and promoting the appearance of bias. There is no need for censorship in a community association publication.

It is important that content on potential issues be presented as well as reports "after the fact." Focus group participants indicated a desire to know more about what the Board is considering [as a means of soliciting input] as well as what the Board decides [after the fact]. Property owners are hungry for a dialogue. Providing this information and promoting interaction by members builds community and provides a basis for a common understanding of the issues that will arise before, during, and after transition to property owner control. This should facilitate the transition process, speed learning and reduce problems after control is transferred and help stabilize the community during transition. This information should be provided in addition to the reports of the standing committees. Property owners [especially non-residents] would also like to know more about what the developer and the resort are doing for planning] and therefore each should be encouraged to contribute material [clearly labeled as to origin]. Columns from the KICA administration regarding issues they believe the membership should be informed about, as well as addressing questions common to any segment of property owners, would also be desirable. Announcing KICA events [such as the Open Forums] months ahead of schedule would encourage non-resident property owners to mark their calendars for events occurring while they are visiting the island. Finally, features such as the Points of Light are encouraged as a means of challenging and rewarding members for their contributions.

4. Format: Changes to enhance the readability of the Digest should be pursued.

Comments we received regarding the readability of the Digest included: changing ink color to reduce costs and to improve contrast [aging eyes!], changing paper to [again] reduce costs, improving the layout and use of headers to facilitate readers finding the information in which they are interested.

5. Timing of issues: The Digest should be published as often as necessary to be current, comprehensive and accurate.

This issue concerned the appropriate number of times the KICA Digest should be published. In general, it is our recommendation that the number of issues should not exceed the extent of meaningful content. Given our recommendations regarding an increase in the type and extent of content, perhaps Digests of varying lengths should be published rather than a set size [for example, standing committee reports quarterly, with Board considerations and actions monthly]. For issues of singular importance perhaps special issues might be appropriate, for example: An issue devoted to the reports of the long range planning subcommittees, the new and improved Digest [showing the change in editorial policy, format and diversity of content that readers should come to expect], the Sandcastle renovations, etc.

Suggestions re: Web site:

Take any and all actions to increase awareness and use of the web site: For example,

Tying Digest content to articles appearing on the web site. Clarifying the instructions for participating in the chats. Advertising the chats earlier and more widely.

Asking for email addresses on the proxy form for the annual meeting.

Summary and Conclusion

We strongly recommend that the KICA Board commit itself to a new and improved KICA Digest. We have offered some suggestions as to actions that would help address the credibility issue. We have not addressed the relationship between the KICA Board and the Communications Advisory Board but it is clear that clarifying expectations and improving communications between the boards is highly desirable. Also, if the suggestions contained in this report are adopted, it should be easier to attract and retain members to the CA-B. High quality communication is essential to high quality communities. This requires creativity, conscientiousness and courage - creativity to find new and better ways to promote meaningful interaction among community association members, conscientiousness to ensure accurate and comprehensive content, and courage to trust the wisdom and understanding of community association members to deal with difficult issues in a constructive manner.

Attachment A

Questions regarding Communications Effectiveness

1. How would you characterize communication on Kiawah?
Specifically: Between the Community Association and Property Owners in general?

And Resident P.O.?
And Non-Resident P.O.?
And the Town of Kiawah Island?

2. What are the responsibilities of the Communications Advisory Board?
3. How would you characterize the operation of the Communications Advisory Board?
4. What would help the CAB to improve its operational effectiveness?
5. Regarding the KICA Digest...
 - What is its mission?
 - How is Digest content determined?
 - Who writes the articles?
 - Who "vets" article topics and content?
 - Who is the "editor"?
 - How would you characterize the Digest's efficacy?
 - What could be done to improve the Digest?