

Second Long-Range Planning Subcommittee Recommendation

Quality of Life Issues (QL-4): Maintaining and Improving the Community Environment

Following is the verbatim report submitted by subcommittee members Ann Connellee, Gordan Dehler, John Manning and Susan Miller.

Introduction

Two issues associated with the notion of `community' on Kiawah Island serve as a foundation for the comments that follow.

First, the meaning of `community' itself can be extremely elusive. It will mean different things to different people, therefore people will likely act in a variety of ways *in the interests of community*. There is not, simply, a single set of actions that can be isolated as being associated with `community' or `community building.' In his comments at the KICA annual meeting, Joe Bunting spoke of being `neighbors,' with an emphasis on consensus building and facilitation. This was consistent with our committee's ongoing discussion focusing on the social aspects of island life.

The second issue concerns the present level of `community' [however defined] on Kiawah Island. We felt that fundamentally there is a high level of community feeling among people, particularly full-time residents. This is evident in many ways, including volunteerism, social events within island neighborhoods, involvement in an association and town affairs [including serving on the long range planning committees], and the many formal and informal clubs active on the island [e.g., POPs]. People are courteous and cordial in their normal daily interactions. In the grand scheme, this is an envious situation on which to build rather than having to address a `crisis' condition.

With this foundation as a starting point, we concurred with the many comments made in the focus groups as well as within both formal and informal discussions among residents concerning `community' on the island. There *are* a number of `tensions' arising on the island that are affecting the elusive sense of community that we enjoy.

Problems/Concerns

The primary concern is focused on the *source* of the tensions that are arising on the island. A central cause originates in the profound growth that the island has experienced in the past decade. This growth of full-time residents and non-residents has created a number of social tensions due to demographic and life style differences. For example, there are more `younger' residents [i.e., upper 40 and lower 50 age groups], many still actively employed, often in dual-income households. Resulting time and family pressures alter the `traditional' life style of Kiawah residents. The key issue, then, is that the greater

diversity of property owners increases the potential for an accompanying diversity of perspectives, needs, and expectations. These differences create tensions, but should be considered 'natural' and anticipated outcomes of a growing community.

Some of the sources of tension identified by the focus groups and our committee discussion include Kiawah Island Club-Governor's Club/non-club membership, early island residents/'settlers'-more recent property owners, East Island-West Island, first gate-second gate, residents-KRA, KICA-Town. Other tensions arise from political differences [e.g., Common Sense], growth issues [e.g., annexation], and KICA Board actions [e.g., recent Property Owner Director election]. A final tension is grounded in the historical context of the island. Power disparities among the developer, resort owners, association, town, and property owners [resident and non-resident] have generated a credibility gap, which is manifested by an erosion of trust between all parties. It is important to note that most of these sources are a consequence of inevitable 'growing pains' that any community might experience.

The outcome of these 'growing pains' manifest themselves in many ways, but the one that seems to be most apparent is a decreasing level of 'civility' among various interest groups, including town and KICA officials. The occasional acrimonious exchanges between individuals and groups have an adverse impact on the feeling of 'community' experienced by both residents and non-residents.

In summary, the sources of potential impact on 'community' are grounded in social and political differences. While we strongly believe that all groups and individuals associated with Kiawah Island genuinely have the *best interests* of the island at heart, there are inevitably *legitimate* differences of perspectives and viewpoints that will arise as to defining what those 'interests' are. For example, KIR's interests include a hotel at East Beach, while others feel a hotel may not be in the island's best interests. Similarly, KRA's interests may differ from those who consider themselves 'settlers.'

Our concern as a committee was explicitly *not* to attempt to *eliminate* those differences per se. We focused on ways that those different perspectives could be articulated rather than suppressed and allowed to fester below the surface. We encourage fostering dialog to build greater awareness of the *differences* among island residents and non-residents, and to openly address those differences of view through a consensus-building process in a civil manner. Only then can constructive dialog take place to develop creative solutions that can address the needs of the various island constituents.

Working toward Solutions

We intentionally view 'community' as an *ongoing process* toward which all interest groups and individuals need to consciously work. Civility is a cultural attribute that needs to be nurtured on a continuous basis; incivility, like weeds in a flowerbed, needs to be identified and eliminated as it occurs to ensure that it doesn't take over the garden.

Potential solutions are discussed below in three categories: communication, social, and political. Communication is a thread that runs through these solutions, serving as an overarching concern on the island.

Communication Policy

The issue of communication has less to do with the `quantity' than the `quality' of information that residents and [especially] non-residents receive relating to island affairs, both social and political. The two primary instruments, KPOG's *Talk* and KICA's *Digest*, apparently serve different purposes. While KPOG has a more explicit [stated] mission, many perceive it to be a voice representing property owners because of its breadth of coverage and depth of discussion of issues and activities occurring on the island. The mission of the *Digest* is less explicit, but its content implies that it represents the voice of the KICA Board with the purpose of promoting the island as a public relations tool while reporting official association activities. The critical dilemma is not the *amount* of information [although monthly publication over quarterly provides new opportunities], but the *substance* of information it includes and more importantly the *credibility* of the publication itself. Ultimately, it is our firm belief that well-informed property owners are better able to experience a sense of `community.'

Thus, our recommendation to the KICA Long Range Planning Committee is to *radically rethink* KICA's communication policies more generally, and the role of the *Digest* in particular. The key concern is to clarify the *Digest's* mission and enhance its credibility in a manner that will inform the membership as well as demonstrate the veracity of information and integrity of the board. A critical component of this initiative could be to raise issues to public scrutiny and facilitate constructive dialog rather than overtly managing information to support the board's own interests.

Social Context

Solutions related to social interactions are more complex. Emerging social distinctions, e.g., KI Club-Governor's Club, are perhaps inevitable but nonetheless imperative to confront. [The mechanism of public forums is addressed in the following subsection on political process.] Some steps are possible, such as scheduling designated `membership integration' activities. For example, currently River Course and Governor's Club members have reciprocal golfing events, which helps break down social barriers. Other similar social activities can be developed.

At the island level, KICA might consider sponsorship of a variety of community-building events that bring people together. Some possibilities include an ice cream social, a talent show, or a picnic-in-the-park. Of course, not everyone will be able nor choose to participate, but as part of the ongoing *process*, such events can be added, improved, discontinued or adapted over time to address the needs of the community itself.

An important aspect of raising involvement and awareness of `community spirit' is to more consciously and intentionally *invite* residents and non-residents to participate in the

social context of the island. While creating the *opportunity* for involvement is crucial, extensive, repetitive, and personalized follow-up is a continuous necessity. Conscious acts of 'invitation' are explicitly *inclusive*; simply creating opportunities are passive at best and exclusive at worst. This initiative includes finding ways to increase the participation of non-resident property owners in the social fabric of the island.

Political Process

The growth and increasing choices for social and political involvement are greater now. Diversity of perspectives and interests have altered the political landscape, particularly as the island becomes more self-governing and less dependent on the role of KRA, i.e., a power shift is occurring. We are not, and cannot be, a monolithic community. Nor should various interest groups possess singularity of purpose. The issue, then, is twofold.

First, as with previous efforts, continued communication needs to explain to property owners the various purposes, interests, and responsibilities of all island entities. More background providing context and explicit objectives needs to accompany information. For example, [acknowledging the previous efforts at informing property owners] the role and relationship of KICA and Town government needs to be elaborated *on an ongoing basis* for new and existing property owners alike. Another example is the helpful list of 'who to call' for various island services that KPOG's *Talk* includes in each issue.

The second part of the political drama is potentially more contentious. As different interests [naturally] emerge, there needs to be a forum for public dialog. People need to have the opportunity to exercise their voice, explain their perspectives, and open their views to the test of public critique. Good ideas will gain support; less viable ones will wither. But all ideas will have an opportunity to be expressed and heard. The website chatroom is one step in this direction, but is limited by access, users' technological skills, time constraints, and a medium that is simply not very 'rich' [the subtleties of true communication, e.g., body language, voice tone, are lost].

One way to foster these *public conversations*, would be through a series of Town Meetings sponsored by KICA and moderated by an independent third party. For instance, sessions might focus on KI Club_Governor's Club concerns, KICA planning, 'settler'_newcomer expectations, Architecture Review Board policies, short- and long-term rental issues, or non-resident property owner concerns. A key would be to publicize these meetings to generate attendance and participation; another would be to accurately report [via the *Digest*] on the points raised and positions taken in the conversation. A two- or three-person coordinating committee could be created to implement the Town Meeting series.

Finally, the vital role of the mediator would be to keep dialog focused on the nightly topics as well as maintain civility by keeping comments focused on ideas and issues rather than individuals and personalities. That is, the island could benefit from the skills of a good process consultant to assist with conducting substantive dialog with civility, openness, and candor.

Our emphatic central point is to create mechanisms to bring island people together to identify political differences and submit them to public conversation. This has greater potential for creating an honest sense of `community' than attempting to suppress differences by superficially manipulating information with the misguided intent of generating false `harmony' among divergent interest groups on the island.

Summary

A critical aspect of `community' is to provide opportunity for the variety of `voices' to be heard and understood. This is not something that is separate from the ongoing daily activities of all island entities, including the Town and KICA, but *integral* to the conduct of their activities. An excellent example of such community building efforts are the current Long Range Planning subcommittees. The identification and invitation of numerous individuals - many who are new to community involvement on Kiawah - into the problem solving process was a highly constructive, positive outcome of the focus group sessions.

Our intent on this subcommittee was to create an overarching framework within which to address issues of `community' on Kiawah Island rather than get bogged down in specific issues, which are symptoms of a larger underlying problem. Narrow issues are part of the broader context of challenges, which if addressed in the spirit of KICA membership involvement and public conversation, can create the conditions for facilitating constructive and satisfactory solutions in the interests of all island property owners.