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Tail wagging the dog on Jekyll Master Plan, public concern growing

Those concerned about the future of Jekyll Island should be very disturbed by the Jekyll Island Authority's (JIA's) attempt to evade their responsibilities in the ongoing update of the island master plan.

At issue is serious doubt that the master plan will be able to serve its function without providing any measurable or enforceable criteria for managing Jekyll Island State Park and ensuring that its character remains intact. After all, a master plan is supposed to provide specific guidance to enable future decision makers to make responsible choices that serve the public. The 2014 master plan attempted to honor that principle by including enforceable objectives, protocol that the JIA is now abandoning.

The final draft of the update of the 2014 master posted on the JIA website skirts a key issue of concern for the public, which is limiting the number of housing units or acres of commercial development that may be approved by the JIA, particularly regarding the proposed commercial and residential redevelopment of part of Jekyll's golf course complex, the plan for which the JIA has not yet finalized.

Although the JIA was pressed by members of the public as to why the master plan update does not address the question of limiting further commercial and residential development of Jekyll Island State Park, the proposed island master plan update rationalizes that this key question cannot be addressed until the golf-course master plan is adopted by the JIA's board of directors. Considering that the various options under review by the JIA regarding the future of Jekyll's 63-hole golf course complex includes golf-course acreage redevelopment for commercial/residential activities, the master plan update should include specific recommendations regarding this key issue.

In effect, because the golf-course master plan has yet to be approved, it is being used by the JIA as an excuse for avoiding any decisions or limitations regarding further development of the state park, a subject which clearly affects Jekyll's future and that properly belongs in the island master plan update. From a planning standpoint, this amounts to the tail wagging the dog..

The public comment period on the master plan is open, and another meeting on it is scheduled for October 14th. Already, most of many written comments received have underscored concern about Jekyll becoming overdeveloped. A "capacity study" of Jekyll Island, commissioned by the JIA in 2018, predicted that the island would reach its functional capacity by 2021, which seems to have been an accurate projection.

Since that capacity study was done, a massive new beachfront hotel was built and 48 condos were constructed at the Jekyll marina. Visitors and residents alike have complained about the island being so crowded and development becoming so intensive that the state park looks like an over-developed resort, degrading the tranquil environmental qualities that made the park's unique character treasured by thousands for decades.

On behalf of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, I urge *Islander* readers to speak out, insisting that the JIA honor its obligation to serve the public by ensuring that the master plan include accountable standards – foremost development limitations – that will safeguard the treasured character of Jekyll Island State Park.

To read the Master Plan and to make a comment, as well as to see the Golf Course Master Plan, Carrying Capacity and Infrastructure Study visit the JIA's Important Documents page at <https://www.jekyllisland.com/jia-category/important-documents/>

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