

JICANet Update

Vol XII, #55

December 14, 2011

Prior Updates can be found on our website at www.jekyllcitizens.org

Item in this Update

- JISPA Board Meeting Record
- Previously Announced Event

Record of JISPA November 14 Board Meeting

Record of the Jekyll Island State Park Authority (JISPA) Board Meeting of 14 November 2011, in Chalets 7/8 of the Interim Convention Center, as recorded for JICA

[NB: the sound quality for this meeting was not up to its usual standard, so some items may not be fully recorded.] Chairman Bob Krueger brought the meeting to order at 9:30 AM. Board members present were Mike Hodges, Al Ike, Laura Lanier, Sybil Lynn, and Richard Royal. Buddy DeLoach, Mark Williams, and legal counsel Adam Kirk were on conference telephone. Also present was Park Authority Executive Director Jones Hooks.. The audience numbered about 40 persons.

Chairman Krueger led off the meeting by reaffirming the Park Authority Board's strong stand against instituting casino gambling in Jekyll Island State Park.

COMMITTEE SESSIONS; CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Museum Director John Hunter introduced Randy Russell of Russell Golf Design. Russell is interested in the historical value of Great Dunes Golf Course, and has proposed restoring the course to its unique 1927 condition. This course retains hints of its original character, and Russell feels that a second justification for its restoration is that it was designed and built by a famous course designer of the golden age of golf (Walter Travis; see http://www.usgamuseum.com/exhibits_artifacts/walter_travis.aspx). Several famous professional golfers played Great Dunes in the 1930s, and compared it to other famous courses in the United States. Great Dunes is the only oceanfront, dunesland, public golf course, designed by a golden-era designer, in the United States. Restoration of Great Dunes would provide a basis for marketing to golfers around the world. Russell has prepared a detailed plan for the potential restoration, and he outlined it for the Board. The course would need a totally new infrastructure and greens construction. A key proposal within the plan is that the large, natural dunes shown in 1927 photos of the course be reconstructed, to restore the original requirement for strategy to play one's ball around the natural formations. Also, Travis believed that greens should seldom if ever be flat; to adhere to this stricture, some change would be required in the Great Dunes greens. Buddy DeLoach suggested that original, rough grasses be used on the restored course. Russell responded that this idea was considered, but set aside due to probability of a negative effect on marketing.

Sea Turtle Center Director Dr. Terry Norton introduced wildlife biologist Will Ricks (specialties: deer and alligator management), Assistant Region Supervisor for Georgia DNR, who presented some information about deer populations in Jekyll Island State Park. Mark Whitney, Chief of Wildlife Management for DNR, was also introduced. Management of deer populations is one goal of the

Park's Conservation Plan. Ricks described his survey of the numbers of deer and their foraging habits in the Park. Ricks' opinion is that the deer population in the Park is too dense, leading to heavy browsing of plants, including plants of low palatability and digestibility that would not be browsed if populations were smaller. Using these plants for food can make it difficult for deer to sustain themselves over hot, dry summers. Ricks and Norton conducted nighttime spotlight surveys at the Airport, on the golf courses, and around the perimeter of the Park. Ricks also conducted a browse survey, in which the number of deer bites is recorded across the dominant habitat types. The deer density was estimated at 80 deer per square mile (712 deer total in the Park, 121 of which are bucks, and 463 are does). Seventy-three percent of the Park's deer live on the golf courses. A healthy population density in the Park would be 20-30 deer per square mile. Some form of harvesting would be required to reach this density. Three further negative consequences of over-dense deer populations are potential for disease transmission (e.g. via ticks), vehicle-deer collisions, and destruction of rare plants. Opportunistic necropsies have revealed that some deer in the Park have heavy tick burdens. Options for harvesting include sharpshooting (safe and effective, with potential meat donation to charities), bow hunting (the "best choice", revenue positive with fees charged, in use in other State parks), immunocontraception (too expensive and ineffective), release of predators (not practical), and trap/relocation (not an option in GA). Norton reiterated that deer management is a part of the Park's Conservation Plan, and the Park's Conservation Team will review Ricks' information, and eventually make a recommendation re deer management to the Authority Board. Norton also announced that the job of Director of Conservation has now been posted, and applications will be reviewed in the near future. A question was asked about safety of hunting in the Park. Ricks noted that the golf courses could be temporarily closed off for a bow hunt, or north-end forested areas could be closed and used for hunting. Ricks noted that safety would require considerable planning, and he offered his assistance, noting that he felt that a safe bow hunt was "definitely doable on Jekyll Island". Commissioner Williams asked whether a lottery-draw hunt was being proposed for the Park? Answer (Whitney): Yes, if the Park Authority agreed to it. In State Parks, to adjust for loss of income due to closure of parts of the Park, there would be a \$30 charge to the hunters. This source of income has been very helpful in other State parks. As an example of safety of controlled hunting in State parks, Whitney cited Fort Yargo State Park within the city limits of Winder, GA. This park is closed down for two months per year while a firearms hunt for deer is conducted. No safety problems have been encountered.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chairman Hodges reported that both income and expenses were under budget for the month of October. Net operating cash income for the month was negative \$143 thousand, and year-to-date net operating income was \$1.014 million (compare \$1.330 million for the previous fiscal year). Director Hooks added that there are 50 confirmed convention bookings for 2012, and 13 proposals for bookings currently pending. Hooks reminded the group that 2011 was expected to be the low point for the Park's bookings, and the new convention bookings for 2012 promise a turnaround in Park revenue.

Director Hooks outlined several proposed changes to the FY12 budget. These included making the Park's Atlanta sales associate a full-time employee, roof replacement on McCormick's Grill and the golf shop, and gas-pump replacement at the maintenance shop.

Bids have been received for installation of pay-lane equipment at the new entry station to be built on the causeway at the Welcome Center. The bid from Access Security Integrated Solutions LLC, out of Atlanta, is recommended. The bid is about \$129,000. The Board approved this recommendation.

Several Park leases were renewed by the Board, including Jekyll Wharf, Island Fun (segway rentals), Jekyll Books, Georgia Power Substation (and the Georgia Power Franchise Agreement), and GISCO

(which is currently operating in bankruptcy; the Emerald Princess docks at Gisco Point). The Trammell Crow lease (the former Buccaneer and Georgia Coast Inn sites) was modified to be similar to the lease of the forthcoming full-service Beach Village hotel (Landmark Associates). Adam Kirk explained that the amendments involved allowing assignment of the leasehold to experienced hoteliers who had the financial wherewithal to carry out the obligations of the lease. The Board will retain the right to refuse any particular assignment if it is deemed unreasonable. The title of the group seeking funding for the Beach Village's full-service hotel was changed to Jekyll Oceanfront Hotel LLC, a corporation formed in early September, with a new investor coming on board. (There is no connection to Jekyll Oceanfront Resort.)

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Human Resources Director Cornell Harvey reported that job-related injuries were down by 50% in the current fiscal year from the previous one, and by more than 100% from earlier years. This was attributed to the Park's new safety and training programs.

MARKETING COMMITTEE

Events Director Beth Burnsed gave a brief visual presentation on the Georgia-Florida Golf Classic. One highlight of the Classic was the hole-in-one on Oleander 13 by Butch Paxton, which earned him a new red truck. A new trophy was unveiled, the Johnny Paulk Cup; the names of Classic winners will be inscribed on the Cup.

Communications Director Eric Garvey announced that Young International, which is producing Jekyll Island branded products, will be offering Club Reserve wines. The wines will become available in January, 2012. They are expected to be on grocery shelves at just below \$10 per bottle, distributed by Empire Distributing. Each case sold will yield \$1.75 to the Jekyll Island Foundation. (It is expected that in future years, some 20,000 cases will be sold.)

Garvey announced that, in view of the potential lodging shortage in the Park upon the opening of the new Convention Center, the Authority will be opening up conventioner-booking availability to official lodging partners outside of the Park, anywhere in Glynn County. A small license fee will be required of each partner, and enable them to use the Park's Housing Bureau.

Mindy Egan regretted the recent rejection by voters of the next SPLOST, which would have supported projects in Jekyll Island State Park. Egan suggested that a source of income might be a fair share of the hotel bed tax that Glynn County collects, based on the Park's lodging-partners program. Garvey responded that it is probably more important to work together with the Golden Isles community, rather than to attempt to rake in more dollars from the partnership.

Cheryl Hart wondered whether there would be more holiday lights than just on the central tree and its environment? Answer: there will be more decorating done in the Historic District, but this year there won't be lighting along the entranceway to the Park due to construction. Director Hooks added that the Park Authority intends to emphasize decorations other than lighting in the future, and focus on the tree-lighting celebration. Hart also asked about plans for the amphitheater? Answer: the Park Authority would like to renovate and use the amphitheater, but at present this is not a high priority item.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Larry Thomas, Development Manager for Phelps Development (developer of the mid-priced Hyatt Hotel to be constructed in the Beach Village) described his proposals for amendment of his ground lease. Thomas reported that he has a fully signed term sheet for his financing, and was in the process of closing. His previous financing agreement had evaporated. He is now working with an international financing source, and is expecting the availability of the funds within 30-45 days. This would permit construction to begin in mid-January, 2012, and opening in January, 2013. The Board approved this schedule.

Legal Associate Chris O'Donnell reported that the Ordinance Project (the company hired is working on making the Park's ordinances modernized, with consistently clear penalties for violations, and easily consulted by the public) is now in the final editing stages. Upon completion of the Project, the public will be able to find and search the ordinances on the internet. This presentation was treated as a first reading; adoption of the changes made in editing will be considered for approval at a subsequent Board meeting, and the changes will be posted on the Park website in the interim.

Sea Turtle Center Director Terry Norton described the plans for green sea turtle Ziva, who will be moving to Sea Life Arizona Aquarium. Ziva stranded on a Florida beach in 2010, after being struck in three places by a boat propeller. Eventually she was transferred to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center for treatment. She could not float properly, so the Center staff designed a Velcro system that included balancing weights. Because of her balance difficulties, she cannot be released into the wild.

Director Hooks reported that 17% of total lodging taxes collected in Jekyll Island State Park now derive from rentals of residential houses. Residential license fees for 2011 amounted to \$6,280. Licenses issued during 2011 amounted to 314, and transfer fees amounted to \$47,838. Already ten residential rental licenses have been sold for 2012.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Krueger expressed pleasure that the Hyatt Hotel in the Beach Village is still on track for an early 2013 opening, and he announced the Board meeting dates for 2012.

Chairman Krueger adjourned the meeting at 11:44 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Y. Newell, Jekyll Island Citizens Association; produced after transcribing from a digital voice recorder

Previously Announced Event

Oceanside Inn & Suites' food drive continues until December 22 at 4 pm. Drop off non-perishable foods at the Sandbar & Grill.

--- and that's the news from Jekyll Island where history lives, nature abounds and soon you can have a bottle of wine that benefits the Jekyll Island Foundation!!! -- Jim Reed, JICANet Editor

JICANet Updates are distributed periodically by the Jekyll Island Citizens Association to its members and interested parties. To subscribe or unsubscribe send an email to jicanet@jekyllcitizens.org