



HIGHTIDINGS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE FOREST BEACH OWNERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.
Winter 2024

Help Us To Build a Safer, More Secure Forest Beach for 2025

Your Association's Safety Committee, established in 2023, has been diligently working to improve safety and reduce crime in Forest Beach. By partnering with the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, the Town, and the Chamber of Commerce, we have made significant strides over the past two years. However, to continue and expand our efforts on your behalf, we need your support.

At our annual meeting this past October, the Safety Committee proposed to include the addition of a private security patrol as well as infrastructure enhancement to provide additional safety measures in Forest Beach. This budget reflects your Association's commitment to tackling safety challenges head-on.

Planned Safety Enhancements Include:

- Private evening security patrols throughout Forest Beach
- Speed monitoring devices to promote safer roadways
- Improvements to bike path safety
- Additional measures to address identified risks and enhance community security

To fund these initiatives, the Safety Committee has proposed a future increase in the annual dues to **\$250 per property**. This small investment will provide significant returns in terms of safety, security, and peace of mind for all residents and visitors.

To ensure everyone's voice is heard, we have attached a survey link below and strongly encourage you to weigh in on this matter.

We Want and Need Your Feedback: Please take a couple of minutes to provide your opinions through the survey link below. We will collect all the information and report the results in an email to all Association members (regardless of your membership status in the Association) and discuss them during a future Owners Association board meeting.

Why Your Membership Matters: In 2025 we will have a Membership Committee to help communicate the reasons more property owners should be paid members of the Association. By doing so, everyone in the community will help us to secure a safer neighborhood for everyone to enjoy. Paid membership provides you the opportunity to:

- Make your voice heard on key community decisions of your Association
- Actively participate in committees and initiatives
- Attend monthly meetings for updates, statistics, and insights from your Safety Committee

A recent survey of 77 property owners found that, of those responding, **85% strongly supported a proposed dues increase**, with another 7% expressing interest pending more information about crime trends in Forest Beach. These results reflect a shared understanding of the importance of proactive safety measures on the part of everyone.

What We Are Asking:

- If you are currently a dues-paying member, we encourage you to renew your membership for 2025 and support a future annual dues increase to help defray the costs of proposed safety measures.
- If you are new to Forest Beach or just have not yet considered the benefits of being a paid member of the Association, now is the perfect time to join us in making Forest Beach a safer, more secure, and enjoyable place to live and visit.

We understand that achieving our funding goal will require a collective effort on the part of all property and business owners by being paid Association members. We plan to continue our collaboration with the Town and are in ongoing discussions with Steve DeSimone our Town Council representative, to explore additional funding opportunities. Your membership and financial support are essential to bringing these safety enhancements come to life. The ultimate goal—a safer and more secure Forest Beach for everyone.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to your Association and the Forest Beach Community. Together, we can ensure Forest Beach remains a safe and vibrant place for residents, homeowners, business and guests alike.



Photo credit: © Cynthia Gladis

Enter this URL in your browser or scan the QR code to get to the survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Security2025-Jan>





2025 Lowcountry Celebration Park Community Happenings

Community events at Lowcountry Celebration Park in 2024 provided vast entertainment offerings, featuring arts, culture, music, food and athletic events that were well attended. The calendar for 2025 is shaping up to be another banner year for our residents and visitors, and it's right in our backyard, so be sure to come out and enjoy all that Lowcountry Celebration Park has to offer! Here are the 2025 Lowcountry Celebration Park Events as of the date of this writing.



Please note numerous events for 2025 need to be finalized and scheduled, including (but not limited to) the Crescendo songwriter series, HHI Jam and Lantern Parade. See you there!

2024 Sea Turtle Nesting and Hatching Season and Beach Report

Hilton Head Island beaches hosted 62 different female turtles who laid 204 nests. This number is significantly down from 3 years ago, when we saw the same mother turtles. This number is also the lowest since 2010, for reasons unknown. Some beaches in South Carolina had record numbers. One turtle reappeared in 2024 after a 13-year absence!

Emergence success was 60.8%, which is also low compared to our average of 78%. Some of the disappointing numbers were due to storms and high tides. 32 nests were adversely affected and 3 were lost. There were no misorientations (hatchlings going the wrong way) in Forest Beach. Yay! 14,119 hatchlings made it to the ocean from Hilton Head beaches, but only one out of 100 makes it to the Gulf Stream, where it spends the next 30 years. The Sea Turtle Patrol responded to 21 strandings with eight survivals.

The sea turtle DNA lab at the University of Georgia analyzes an egg from each nest. There were 16 first time mothers (nesting on Hilton Head for the first time), 5 of whom have known mothers and 3 of whom are mothers' first daughters. The U of GA is expanding DNA analysis to include paternity; there may be multiple paternity in one nest. The DNA information is amazing!

Climate change is having an effect on nesting activity. As temperatures rise, nesting season begins earlier. Sex is determined by the temperature inside the nest halfway through incubation, and higher temperatures translate into more females (hot chicks, cool dudes). The data shows that in Raine Island, Australia the green sea turtle hatchlings are all female. This is not good.

The 2025 nesting season will be challenging due to Hilton Head Island's beach renourishment schedule. Nests will have to be carefully moved and hatching activity will be closely monitored. Nesting season begins May 1 and ends October 31.

The Sea Turtle Patrol conducted 200+ turtle talks to visitors and community groups in 2024. In our area there is a turtle talk every Monday evening at 8:00 during June, July and August in Celebration Park. There is also an active education program in the local schools.

To protect the loggerhead turtle, an endangered species, remember to turn off oceanfront lights at 10 pm during nesting season, fill in all holes and take home everything you brought with you to the beach.

Beach Renourishment: Bringing Sand to the Beach

The Town of Hilton Head Island launched their ongoing beach renourishment campaign back in 1990. Since that start date, our beaches have been on a schedule for additional renourishments every 8-10 years. If everything falls into place, our latest round of beach renourishment in Forest Beach will begin in the late summer of 2025 and last until early spring 2026.

Beach renourishment is a process whereby sand is dredged from offshore sandbanks and pumped onto existing beaches. Then the large mounds of freshly pumped sand are leveled out by bulldozers to both elevate and expand the existing beach.

We can expect some 700,000 cubic yards of sand to be pumped out on to the beach between the north side of Palmetto Dunes south to the north side of Sea Pines. The entire stretch of beach in Forest Beach will receive new sand.

Per the Town website, disruptions at individual properties generally last one week or less as the moving operation progresses. Once the operation is under way the project will advance along the beach at a rate of 200 to 300 feet per day.

Also, the project schedule was developed to avoid significant impacts to nesting sea turtles and migratory shore birds, including federally protected piping plovers and red knots. All construction windows are set by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

So, despite the noise and inconvenience, beach renourishment is a most worthy endeavor. Long-time neighbors in North Forest Beach can tell you how, before 1990, their beach was only a rockpile wall and waves at high tide.

Expect project delays. Your Association will follow this project and keep you updated to its progress.

Native Plant Gardens in Coastal South Carolina: A Celebration of Ecology and Beauty

By Natural Resources & Forest Committee of the Association

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina has a unique blend of warm climate, sandy soils, and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, and is a prime location for native plant gardens. Native gardens enhance the landscape's natural beauty and play a crucial role in supporting our region's ecology. By incorporating native plants into our garden designs, we contribute to biodiversity preservation, wildlife habitat improvements and create resilient landscapes, suited to our environmental challenges.

Our Island environmental challenges include hurricanes, saltwater intrusion, and flooding. Native plants are well-equipped to handle these stresses, thanks to their deep root systems and natural tolerance to salty conditions. For example, Spartina grass, a staple of South Carolina's salt marshes, stabilizes soil and prevents erosion, even in the face of rising sea levels.

Native plants enhance the resilience of our coastal community. By reducing runoff and improving soil quality, these plants help mitigate flooding and protect water quality in nearby waterways. Gardens with native trees and plants also contribute to cooling temperatures.

Native plants have evolved naturally in a specific region over thousands of years. In coastal South Carolina, these plants adapted to the humid subtropical climate, fluctuating water levels, and salty conditions. Native species such as sweetgrass, yaupon holly, live oak, and hickory thrive in the region and require minimal irrigation and fertilization.

By choosing native plants, gardeners reduce the need for chemicals and excessive watering, which can harm nearby ecosystems, including delicate marshlands and estuaries that define our region. Native plants support pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, essential for the health of local ecosystems and agriculture.

One of the most significant advantages of native plant gardens is their ability to provide critical habitat for wildlife. Hilton Head Island and coastal South Carolina are home to an array of species, from migratory birds to amphibians and small mammals. Gardens that feature native plants offer food, shelter, and breeding grounds. Plants like wax myrtle and beautyberry produce berries that feed birds during the winter months. Flowers such as black-eyed Susan attract pollinators; milkweed and Carolina geranium are native host plants for caterpillars. These interactions can foster a dynamic and thriving ecosystem right in our backyard.

Beyond their ecological benefits, native plant gardens bring cultural and aesthetic value to Hilton Head Island. Many of these plants hold historical and cultural significance, particularly for our living and historic Gullah-Geechee Community, which has long used sweetgrass in traditional basket weaving. Incorporating native plants into our gardens connects us with the area's natural heritage and fosters a sense of place.

From a design perspective, native plant gardens offer a palette of colors, textures, and forms that reflect the natural beauty of the Lowcountry. The purple plumes of sweetgrass and the bright purple berries of beautyberry can create visually stunning landscapes that change with the seasons. Gardeners should consider grouping plants with similar water and light requirements to create thriving plant communities. Don't forget to incorporate a mix of trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses to ensure year-round interest and provide diverse habitats for wildlife.

Starting your native plant garden is a rewarding endeavor. First, identify plants native to the region and suited to the site conditions, such as soil type, sunlight, and moisture levels. Local resources, such as the South Carolina Native Plant Society, Beaufort County's Clemson Extension Service, and the National Wildlife Federation can provide valuable guidance. You can even certify your garden as a wildlife habitat on the NWF website!

Native plant gardens in coastal South Carolina are more than just beautiful landscapes; they are vital to the health of our region's ecosystems. By embracing native plants, we contribute to biodiversity, wildlife support, and coastal resilience against environmental challenges. Native gardens celebrate our natural and Lowcountry cultural heritage and provide a tangible way to protect and enhance the natural beauty of our Hilton Head Island home for generations to come.

Pay Your Annual Dues Online

Don't want to pay your dues by check? The option to pay your dues by credit card is available through PayPal on the Association's website. Annual dues of \$150 are billed in January for existing property owners, and each quarter for new owners and property transfers. When paying your dues using the dues form, please ensure that your email address is legible.

How Long Will Coligny Beach Parking Remain Free?

By Jack Daly

On October 1st the Town of Hilton Head Town Council passed a resolution to begin charging for beach parking at all Town-owned beach parks. The new parking plan is a seasonal plan set to run during the peak season from March 1st until September 7th each year. Parking rates are proposed to be \$3 per hour with a \$15 maximum during the weekdays and a \$20 maximum on weekends. All Town of Hilton Head Island property owners will be eligible for two free beach parking passes.

It would be dismissive to think that any plan to charge for beach parking at the Coligny Beach Parking Lot will not have a number of disruptive and painful impacts on both the Coligny Commercial District and Forest Beach as a community. To that end, our Town Council decided to delay implementation of their paid beach parking program in Coligny until 2026, at the earliest.

In the interim, Town Council commissioned an *ad hoc* committee to collect Coligny Beach parking data during the 2025 season. The collected parking data will be studied to better understand what impacts a paid beach parking program at Coligny Beach may pose to the businesses in the Coligny District and residents of the Forest Beach community.

The result of the 2025 Coligny parking study will be presented to Town Council and Town Staff. Hopefully the results will help guide them to either revamp their paid parking in Coligny in such a way as to mitigate the negative effects of paid beach parking on the adjacent business and private properties, or it may simply prove to Town Council that the paid parking plan for Coligny Beach would have unworkable problems and should be abandoned.

So what would be some of the immediate effects of a paid parking program on both the Coligny District businesses and Forest Beach residents?

Coligny District businesses would be the first to suffer. Think about this. Paid parking would mean that employees would have to pay to park just to get to work. Many Coligny District employees cannot afford to live on the island and instead drive in from Bluffton, so they would not qualify for free beach parking passes. A worker making \$15 an hour would now make \$12 an hour after paying \$3 an hour to park. There is a well-documented workforce shortage on the island. Charging them for parking is a *de facto* tax on workers and would only further discourage them from making a long drive, through traffic, to work. Is this what we are trying to accomplish?

Businesses would also suffer from a loss of customer parking from rogue beachgoers who refuse to pay for parking. Beachgoers who refuse to use the pay parking lots will simply find parking in shopping center lots, hotel lots, and any other private, unprotected parking lots. This was clearly proven back in the 1990s during the Towns' last attempt at paid parking in Coligny.

Just like in the 1990s, rogue beach parking would also spill over into residential neighborhoods. By law there is no street parking allowed in Forest Beach. But then again, there are very few "No Parking" signs and no active parking enforcement. Property owners who find vehicles parked on their property would bear the burden of contacting a towing company and having the vehicles removed. The Town's Code Enforcement could be overwhelmed with calls for cars on the roadways that do not belong. Historically, unless the vehicle is preventing emergency vehicles from passing, the Town will not have the vehicles towed from the roadway. In Beaufort County, a vehicle cannot be cited by the Sheriff's Office for a parking violation as the law requires that the driver of the vehicle be cited. Additionally, the Town does not have a court to hear pleas from cited drivers. Furthermore, how much Town Staff does the Town want to dedicate to the job of parking enforcement? Do we create a new Town department to do just that?

Sea Pines could also be impacted. If it's \$20 to park for the day in Coligny and only \$9 to get into Sea Pines, which way do you turn?

As you can see the prospect of paid parking at Coligny Beach is a far more complicated issue than just figuring out how to collect and spend the money. All of the problematic side effects listed above are not merely speculation – these are the exact results we got the last time the Town charged for beach parking in Coligny.

Long-time Forest Beach residents on your Forest Beach Owners Association board have made every effort to remind Town Council about the unintended repercussions that come with paid parking. To that end, Town Council decided to create the *ad hoc* committee to collect fresh 2025 parking data and study the problem a little more closely. We hope that the Association, Coligny merchants, and Forest Beach residents will be included in the discussions. If the Town is considering a new program that will certainly have an out-sized impact on the businesses and residents of Forest Beach, it's only fair that you and your representatives, the Forest Beach Owners Association, be involved.

Be sure you signed up for our emails. It's the easiest way to stay in the loop.

With the increasing use of electronic communications, the Association relies more and more on this method of keeping you informed. If you do not receive at least one email a month from us, your email address is not in our database. The best method to get your email address added is to send us an email at fbassn@gmail.com and use a Subject of "Add My Address" to Email.

Also, please be sure to add our email address to your address book so that these communications do not wind up in your SPAM folder. We can add multiple email addresses for everyone, so send us as many email addresses as you wish us to communicate with.