



HIGHTIDINGS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE FOREST BEACH OWNERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.
Winter 2025

The Town of Hilton Head 2026–2028 Strategic Action Plan and Land Management Ordinance Task Force

The Hilton Head Town Council has approved a 2026–2028 Strategic Action Plan and has designated updating the Land Management Ordinance (LMO) as a key priority. Within the approved 2026–2028 Strategic Action Plan, Goal #1 focuses on “Protecting Island Character Through Growth Management.” To support this objective, Town Council has adopted a strategy aimed at advancing a coordinated, long-term approach to growth management through a comprehensive framework. This framework is intended to align land-use regulations, planning tools, land acquisition initiatives, and capital improvement investments in order to maintain Hilton Head Island’s unique character, promote sustainable development and safeguard natural and cultural resources.

Eleven action items support this strategy, including two that are particularly relevant to the proposed LMO Task Force:

- **Action Item 1.5:** Update the Design Guide and ensure consistency with the revised LMO.
- **Action Item 1.6:** Update the LMO to align with District Plans and the Comprehensive Plan.

In support of these initiatives, Town staff have begun a thorough review and revision of the LMO to address changing community needs, evolving development trends, and current best practices in land-use regulation. Due to the complexity of the LMO and its significant influence on growth and development, transparency and inclusive public engagement are critical. Establishing a stakeholder-based task force is considered a best-practice approach, bringing together diverse perspectives related to zoning, subdivision, and development standards.

The Land Management Ordinance Task Force will serve as a structured platform for community members, industry professionals, and technical experts to share insight and provide input. The task force will develop recommendations for Town staff, the Planning Commission, and Town Council to help ensure that updates to the ordinance appropriately balance preservation of community character, economic health, and environmental responsibility.

Impact on Forest Beach

In contrast to other neighborhoods, Forest Beach has possibly the oldest and least comprehensive set of covenants on the island. The downside to this is that the Town LMO has an oversized impact on Forest Beach. Through the LMO the Town can impose its will on Forest Beach in a way they cannot in other communities who have more restrictive covenants. Also consider the fact that through various taxes and fees Forest Beach generates some 40% of the Town’s revenue. The Town has a vested interest in ensuring that Forest Beach is an important economic driver for the sake of the Town’s income. Other island neighborhoods benefit from this economic driver model as it helps keep their property taxes low.

It is vitally important that we, as Forest Beach, monitor and engage with Town Staff, Town Council, and the LMO Task Force during the LMO rewrite process. In this rewrite process both the Forest Beach Association and its residents need to speak for Forest Beach and not allow Town Staff, Council, or other neighborhoods redesign our future in a way that benefits them at our expense. *(continued on page 2)*



Photo credit: © Cynthia Gladis

A New Pocket Park in Forest Beach

Forest Beach is getting a new park! The Town of Hilton Head is spending \$900,000 to improve the pedestrian walkway and provide a shaded resting place on the northwest corner of the Coligny Circle. The new pocket park will improve corridor access with a new 14’ wide multi-use pathway as well as improved access to Coligny Plaza. Features include bike racks, a bike repair station, and lots of shaded seating. According to the Town website the new park is on budget and on schedule to be completed by April 2026.

Pay Your Annual Dues Online

If you are currently a dues-paying member, we encourage you to renew your membership for 2026. 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.

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Composition of the LMO Task Force

The LMO Task Force will include representatives from a broad range of interests, consisting of:

1. **Three members** of Town Council;
2. **Four chairpersons** representing the Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation, and the Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force;
3. **Six representatives** from the following sectors:
 - Hilton Head–Bluffton Chamber of Commerce;
 - Hilton Head Area Home Builders Association;
 - Hilton Head Area Realtors;
 - Short-term rental industry;
 - Hospitality industry; and
 - Workforce housing sector;
4. **Three general managers** (or comparable positions) representing planned developments and resort communities on Hilton Head Island, selected from a designated list;
5. **Five Hilton Head Island residents**; and
6. **The Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager**, serving as non-voting, *ex officio* members.

Behind closed doors Town Council selected 21 people to populate the Task Force. Unfortunately for Forest Beach, only 1 of the 21 members of the Task Force lives in Forest Beach. To say that Forest Beach is underrepresented on the LMO Task Force is an understatement in our opinion. Especially when you consider that the Town LMO has an over-sized impact on non-gated neighborhoods like Forest Beach.

Mission of the LMO Task Force

The LMO Task Force will have a two part mission.

- Review of draft LMO provisions related to land use, zoning, subdivision regulations, development standards, design requirements, and related topics; and
- Submission of recommendations to Town staff, the Planning Commission, and Town Council through majority vote.

Any portion of the current LMO can be reviewed for amendment and the Task Force can also offer new LMO suggestions for Town Council approval. So basically everything is on the table for discussion, but we are not in the room. That's concerning to say the least.

Conclusion

Since we are not a part of the LMO Task Force it is hard to predict where the LMO rewrite process may take us. Forest Beach is on the outside looking in.

But there are some positives. Our Town Councilman Steve DeSimone is the sole Forest Beach representative on the Task Force and he is the Chairperson as well. All Task Force meetings will be public with public comments allowed, so please plan to attend in-person and participate.

Your Forest Beach Owners Association Board will be attending the meetings and monitoring the process. We will be posting reminders about upcoming meetings as well as sending out updates from the meetings. We ask that you as neighbors support your Association Board and support Forest Beach in this process. Maybe the LMO rewrite result in a huge positive impact and the best thing that has ever happened to Forest Beach. Maybe the Task Force will work up some horrible proposals to impose on Forest Beach and we will all have to appear in person at Town Hall to push back. We don't know. ***But rest assured that your Association is monitoring the process, will keep you informed, and will help you engage if necessary.***

Natural Resources Committee Lawton Beach Forest Preserve

The Forest Beach Owners Association (FBOA) owns an environmental treasure. This 35+ acre protective conservation easement is known as Lawton Beach Forest Preserve (LBFP). It stretches from the Alder Lane Beach access to Laurel Lane, and is held by the Beaufort County Open Land Trust (BCOLT), granted on December 28, 2009.

This Maritime Forest conservation area affords a safeguard of our beachfront habitat and dune systems, and is on the front line of defense in facing coastal resilience challenges, such as flooding, cyclical king high tides, hurricanes, impending sea level rise, and encroaching development. It is protected by beachfront management laws and regulations of the Town of Hilton Head, The State of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the United States Government.

The area possesses significant ecological and natural resources, and safeguards water quality, green space and historic conservation values. The LBFP is home to numerous bird and wildlife species and is prime habitat for shorebirds on the Audubon Priority List – red knots, ibises, plovers, sandpipers and the like. It also serves as a stopover for migratory birds and butterflies.

The Association acts as a land steward and has the responsibility and obligation to conserve the area. Each and every December, the Associations' Natural Resources Committee takes a field trip and walks the Preserve with BCOLT to assess its status. Areas requiring attention, such as removal of invasive, non-native plants are noted. Our goal is to replace plantings with native species to promote a healthy maritime ecosystem and support wildlife.

Audubon of Hilton Head Island is interested in assisting with our conservation efforts. This includes the installation of bird boxes to encourage birds to further populate the area. You can pitch in by starting your own native plant garden and adding a bird bath to your yard. Ideally, we would like to create a large number of interconnected habitats throughout the Forest Beach community. Native plant gardens enrich the overall health of our region's environs. By embracing native plants, we all contribute to biodiversity, wildlife support and coastal resilience challenges. If you need assistance with native plant selection, you can visit the South Carolina Native Plant Society (SCNPS.Org) or the National Wildlife Federation (NWF.org). The Coastal Discovery Museum holds an annual native plant sale.

Please, we need your help to conserve this natural environment and protective habitat ecosystem. If you would like to take a role to help preserve, restore and maintain this beautiful, pristine, natural jewel, please contact us at fbassn@gmail.com. We would love to hear from you! Thank you!

Safety Committee

The Safety Committee continues to work with the Town, County and State on improving the safety of our roads and pathways. We have a reduced speed limit on Lagoon Road! The Town is investigating the potential of have a "scramble" pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Lagoon Road and Pope Avenue. A "scramble" is where all vehicles are stopped in all directions, including all turns, while pedestrians are allowed free movement in the intersection to cross in any direction. Once the pedestrian movement is complete, the pedestrians are stopped from crossing in any direction while the traffic is then allowed to move with signalized turns and alternating directions until the next pedestrian "scramble" is activated.

The Town is also looking at creating raised crosswalks along South Forest Beach Drive. This will allow pedestrian to be more visible to traffic and will cause a calming effect on the traffic speed as cars will have to slow down to cross over the raised crosswalks.

The Association is in discussions with a private security company that will have detention and arrest authority. We are hoping to have further information to pass along during the first quarter of 2026. We are hoping to be able to offer nightly security patrols throughout Forest Beach at an affordable price. Once we have been able to confirm the logistics and verify the scope of authority this company can provide, we will let you know.

Beach Committee

A lot has occurred on the beach during the past twelve months. Coligny beach remains the only free public parking lot on the Island. After the former Aunt Childa's building was demolished, the town added more free public parking spaces in that location.

The 2025 sea turtle nesting numbers were somewhat disappointing. There were 237 confirmed sea turtle nests laid on the Island (Sea Turtle Patrol was hoping for 350+); 131 of those were relocated to areas above the mean high tide line. 16,537 hatchlings made it to the ocean. We think that the low numbers were due to the snow and prolonged cold temperatures last January that may have killed much of the food supply. Female loggerhead sea turtles must eat huge amounts of crustaceans and other crunchies pre-nesting because they do not eat anything during the nesting period (May-October). So, everyone is hoping for record numbers next season...



Photo credit: © Cynthia Gladis

The public was invited to sea turtle talks during the summer every Monday evening at Celebration Park and to weekly Wednesday evening beach sweeps near the Tiki Hut.

Sea turtle genetics continue to evolve; we already know a lot about the females who nest on the Island, and we are beginning to study paternal DNA. The town recently announced that the Sea Turtle Patrol will occupy the old Wild Wings building for a laboratory, museum, offices, and space for the turtle "amberlance." With this new home, the Sea Turtle Patrol will expand its focus to include marine mammals (whales, dolphins, manatees). There were 24 sea turtle stranding events in 2025; 5 were rehabilitated and returned to the ocean.

We are currently in Phase II of the beach renourishment. Phase I has been completed; this includes Fish Haul, Pine Island and Port Royal (the heel of the island). Phase II includes central island (that is Palmetto Dunes, Shipyard, and our neighborhood, Forest Beach) and will continue through the middle of March. The southern part of the island (Sea Pines and South Beach) will continue through the end of May. Phase III will include the construction of breakwater structures at Pine Island, schedule to be determined. This calendar is subject to change depending on weather and equipment.

On November 22 Coligny beach hosted the annual Lantern Parade, attended by thousands. There were issues with parking and traffic, but the lanterns were incredible!

The beach affords us so much. Please stay off the dunes; they protect the coastline. Please leave only your footprints...no holes, no trash (this includes broken chairs, umbrellas, tents, fireworks) and no cigarette butts!



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.