ISLAND CHARACTER VISION STATEMENT

Development shall exhibit a harmonious relationship with the natural environment by blending the principles of sensitive site planning, skillful architectural design, and an emphasis on landscaping that preserves and enhances the native vegetation.
THE GOAL OF THIS DESIGN GUIDE IS TO PRESERVE THE ISLAND CHARACTER BY DIRECTING DEVELOPMENT TO

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<th>Preserve significant existing site features, trees, &amp; vegetation.</th>
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<td>Design structures with subtle visual impact. Utilize natural materials, texture, and colors.</td>
<td>Coordinate and harmonize the design of structures, parking, and site amenities.</td>
<td>Provide continuity of design on all facades of the building.</td>
<td>Demonstrate the fundamental principles of good architectural design.</td>
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<td>Provide landscaping of a scope and size that is in proportion to the scale of the development.</td>
<td>Design and maintain landscaping in its natural shape and size.</td>
<td>Promote pedestrian scale and circulation.</td>
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Hilton Head Island has long been recognized as an attractive place to live and visit. But what gives it its aesthetic appeal? Modern day development on the Island established a certain “look” based on our cultural and environmental heritage. The early developers, architects, landscape architects, and planners recognized the importance of good design that was sensitive to the island’s history and natural environment. This theme evolved into what we call Island Character.

Island Character is not a style of architecture. It can not be defined in simple terms or achieved by following a certain set of strict design requirements. Island Character is as much a process as it is an end product. It is also a philosophy about design; a philosophy that puts an emphasis on thorough consideration of all elements of a project.

This guide is meant to provide owners, developers, and design professionals with an awareness of the major factors that must be involved in order for projects to achieve Island Character. Rather than an attempt to stifle good design it is meant to inspire the highest quality design. Its usefulness will depend on the extent that owners, developers and designers understand this concept and put forth the effort required to achieve Island Character.
SITE DESIGN

A critical first step in achieving Island Character is a complete analysis of the existing site conditions. This information will be the basis for determining how to design a project so that the result will complement, not detract from, its surroundings.

“Build your house so that you may still look upon all that charmed you and lose nothing of what you saw before the house was built, but see more.”
-Frank Lloyd Wright

For a project to achieve Island Character a site analysis must be used to identify features and constraints to be considered in order to lose nothing but see more. At a minimum a site analysis must identify significant topography, existing vegetation and specimen trees, setbacks and buffers, access points, orientation, view opportunities, wetlands, and any other site features that may influence design.

Once identified these items shall form the basis for the site design. Collectively they will determine the optimum orientation and location of structures as well as the location of parking, stormwater retention areas and other elements to be placed on the site.

A good site design cannot ignore the findings of the site analysis simply to satisfy the requirements of the development. This fact is the basis for achieving Island Character.
While the island generally has little variation in topography it is important to identify the existing conditions in terms of drainage and flood elevation requirements. In consideration of the latter, alternative methods such as dry flood proofing and terracing should be utilized in lieu of or in conjunction with fill to reduce the impact of elevation changes. Continuity of pedestrian circulation within and between sites should be maintained where appropriate. Where unique topographic variation does exist it should be identified in order to preserve it.

Two of the most important site features that need to be identified are existing vegetation including understory and significant trees. These are extremely important elements to be addressed in the placement of structures and other site features as trees and forest areas contribute to the overall quality of life and identity of Hilton Head Island. In some cases the location of the tree canopy or a specimen tree will be the dominant determining factor in the site design as well as the architectural design of the structures. Existing vegetation that can be preserved, especially in buffers, adds significantly to the project's Island Character as well as reduces the cost of new landscaping.

Adjacent use and street setback lines and buffers must be identified as required in LMO Sections 16-5-102 and 16-5-103 respectively in order to establish the extent of site features such as parking spaces and stormwater retention areas. These are not "build to" lines but simply define the area in which structures and other development are allowed and separate development from adjacent streets and adjacent development. Separation serves to ensure protection from street traffic as well as provide adequate air circulation and light between structures. Projects that fill the buildable area with structures and paving will have a difficult time achieving Island Character. See pages 21-22 for additional information regarding categories of buffers.
Parking lot layout requirements are located in LMO Section 16-5-107. Projects which require a large number of parking spaces should break the lot into several smaller areas separated by landscaped open space, other site features, or structures. Where appropriate, large areas with rigid layouts should be avoided and staggered or meandering designs used. This will help save trees, slow down vehicles and create site interest. When parking under buildings, provide adequate architectural and landscape screening to prevent views into the garage.
SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability, using a resource so that it is not depleted or permanently damaged, is a major initiative for the Town of Hilton Head Island and a key component of Island Character.

Sustainable practices can be incorporated into overall site design in the protection of existing resources and the siting of structures to make the best use of seasonal shade and solar gain. Building materials can be selected that are efficiently produced or harvested, reduce waste, and are responsibly maintained. Existing plant material should be retained and supplemented with native plants. Gutters, rain barrels, and rain gardens can capture rain water and help break down pollutants. Wildlife should be considered when planting such as using plants that produce berries, seeds, or other wildlife food or provide nesting/resting sites and pruning including planning pruning to avoid bird nesting season. Timeless architecture, designed with a high level of quality, is more sustainable in that it won’t need to be redevelopment as it ages.

Additional information regarding sustainability on Hilton Head Island can be found on the Town of Hilton Head Island’s website at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov/sustainability/home.cfm.
While function is important in the design and location of stormwater retention areas, aesthetic considerations must also be addressed. Whether dry or wet the shape and appearance should look natural and not detract from the overall site design. Stormwater Management standards are located in LMO Section 16-5-109.

The first flush runoff (0.5” to 1.0”) from paved streets and parking areas is very detrimental to maintenance of good water quality. Therefore, filtering of runoff from streets and parking areas through vegetation, gravel, sand, or other filter mediums to remove oil, grease, gasoline, particulates and organic matter is required before the runoff leaves the site or enters any natural or manmade water body. Ideas for these and other Low Impact Development (LID) designs to reduce volume and improve quality of stormwater runoff, such as neighborhood LID design, local case studies, and much more, can be found in “Low Impact Development in Coastal South Carolina: A Planning and Design Guide”. This guide is the culmination of five plus years of work on the part of multiple state, federal, and local government partners. This guide can be accessed at www.northinlet.sc.edu/LID.

Planting native vegetation is encouraged to filter runoff and provide visual interest. See page 23 for additional information on common native plants and where they should be planted.
ARCHITECTURE

To achieve Island Character the architectural design of structures shall be visually harmonious with the overall natural appearance, history and cultural heritage of Hilton Head Island. Structures must be designed to be unobtrusive and set into the natural environment. They should demonstrate a strong relationship to the outside and avoid appearing foreign to the site. In addition, all sides of a structure should be given the same design consideration as the entrance or street façade. The use or function of a structure will also be a determining factor in its design but need not sacrifice the intent of Island Character. A light industrial building can exhibit good Island Character as well as an office or multifamily project.

Structures shall demonstrate the general principles of good design including but not limited to those dealing with form, mass, scale, detail, materials, and colors.

“The architectural design and construction philosophy... is that buildings should be unobtrusive in form and color in order to complement their natural setting. The main concern is that the total community be homogeneous in feeling in a park-like setting and free from the discordant architectural shapes and colors which vie for attention and attempt to create greater visual impact than a neighbor's.”

-Charles Fraser
FORM

The form or shape of structures should avoid monotonous unbroken planes or unrelieved repetition of shape. Visual interest and shadow play can be created by several techniques including the use of offsetting planes with a variety of depths. Roof form is also a key element to achieve Island Character. Typically gable, hip or shed roof forms are desirable with a minimum pitch of 6/12. In larger structures a variety of forms can provide greater visual interest and break up large roof planes. Flat roof designs should generally not be used unless concealed within another roof or other architectural element. Overhangs of sufficient depth and in proportion to the façade height can also be important to roof form and for shadow play.

MASS

The structure shall not be of such mass that it dominates its surroundings or adjacent development. Architectural form and detailing must be used to reduce the appearance of the mass of the structure. While height limits and setback angles are established in Chapter 3 of the LMO, upper areas of taller structures should be designed to minimize their visual appearance. Larger structures will require a greater degree of sensitivity to site location and inclusion of larger forms of landscaping.
The proportions of a structure shall be such that a sense of human scale is established. That is, the size of architectural elements should not be overpowering and should relate to pedestrian circulation. They should not create a sense of confinement or confusion. A horizontal emphasis and limited vertical treatment can be used to control scale. Architectural elements such as trellises, canopies, terraces or porches at grade level are also important to consider in achieving human scale.

**CONTEXT**

The context of the structure must also be taken into account and consideration shall be given to compatibility with other development in the area. Distinctive vernacular styles like Georgian or Mediterranean are to be avoided except where already established in defined neighborhoods such as Shelter Cove or Main Street. “Franchise” or “theme” architecture is not appropriate for the Island. If used as a starting point, “franchise” architecture should be modified based on the structure’s local context to meet Island Character.

The structures along Main Street have a similar vernacular, in color, material, and architectural elements. It is important to consider context when introducing new buildings to an existing area.
**DETAIL**

Architectural details must be given significant consideration. Clean, simple, appropriate details are desirable while excessive ornamentation is to be avoided. Details should be consistent with the design concept for the entire structure. Their purpose should be to provide visual interest, human scale, and architectural expression. Elements such as shutters or dormers should be functional so as not to appear as false features. Window openings must be in proportion to the façade or façade element and have a unified relationship in overall design. Details such as exposed rafter tails, brackets, and louvers all add to Island Character.

**MATERIALS**

Generally materials common to the area or historically present should be selected. Suitable materials may include tabby stucco, smooth finish stucco, brick, wood, shake siding, metal, and glass. Other materials may be considered but in lesser quantities. All materials should be high quality, durable materials, suitable for the Hilton Head Island environment. A variety of compatible contrasting textures should be used to provide visual interest. Single material façades are generally not appropriate. Materials should be arranged in logical fashion, lighter above heavier, and in relationship to other materials in terms of percentage, not equal or dominating. Reflective materials other than glass must be avoided. The use of wood or wood simulating materials is strongly encouraged.
COLOR

CONTEXT
The overall exterior color scheme must be selected to be harmonious with the neighborhood and blend with the natural surroundings of the site. Earth tones must be chosen as the predominant colors. Colors shall not be used to cause the structure to stand out from others or its background. Consideration must be given to the compatibility of colors with those existing in the vicinity. The size of the structure and the amount of shading it will receive are also factors in the selection of colors. Colors that may be approved on sites with good tree coverage providing adequate shading may not be approved on a site with inadequate shading.

HUE
Any accent colors shall be of analogous tints, shades, or tones that are low in intensity or brightness. Primary, secondary, and highly saturated, bright tertiary colors should be avoided. Accent colors may only be approved for very limited use where appropriate to highlight a feature of the design or provide visual interest. A small area of brighter color may be appropriate to emphasize an architectural detail but would not be approved for a larger area. The number of such colors shall be limited and must be compatible within the overall color scheme.

CONTRAST
Exterior color schemes must avoid placing together colors with values that are highly contrasting. Subtle levels of contrast are desirable to emphasize architectural elements or to provide visual interest. A slightly darker wall color on the bottom story of a two-story structure may help reduce the visual height of the building. The use of black, white or off-white is typically avoided and may be approved only for very limited use where a high level of contrast is warranted.
THE LANDSCAPE

The landscape, the site’s existing and new vegetation, plays an essential role in creating the Island Character. Its design and maintenance must therefore be given prominent attention starting at the conceptual phase of a project. Historically, Live Oaks, palms, and marsh grasses have been predominant in the existing island landscape. Great care should be taken to incorporate this aesthetic into the design, preserve a variety of existing native trees and shrubs, and minimize environmental impacts from development.

Landscaping, planting of new vegetation, is to be used to supplement the existing vegetation and provide for a harmonious setting for the site’s structures, parking areas or other construction. The landscape will contain four basic elements

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Groundcovers
- Buffers

The use of native plants is strongly encouraged, due to their pest resistance, drought tolerance, and importance to wildlife and island biodiversity.
Tree removal and replacement requirements are established in LMO Section 16-6-104. While these minimum requirements must be adhered to, there are additional aesthetic considerations that must also be implemented when a tree removal or landscape plan is submitted. These include:

- Preserving the tree canopy;
- Protecting significant or specimen trees and clusters of trees;
- Preserving smaller understory trees and shrubs;
- Requiring larger size replacement trees or additional trees depending on the size or number of existing trees removed or relationship to building mass and height; and
- Selection of particular species of replacement trees within a required category for screening or visual effect.

The top priority for the location of existing trees and new trees are street buffers, parking lots, and the area between parking lots and structures. This is a major component of Island Character.
SHRUBS

Shrubs must be selected to complement the natural setting, provide visual interest, and screen less desirable elements of the project. The species used must take into consideration the site’s growing conditions, existing vegetation types, and in some instances deer and salt tolerance. While a variety of species is desirable for texture and color, emphasis must be given to overall order and continuity of the landscape plan. Seasonal availability and planting time period also need to be considered.

The number of plants will be determined by the scope of the project and the function of the landscaping. A variety of sizes is desirable to create a “layered” appearance for visual interest and a sense of depth. Placement of shrubs must also take into account the location of existing mature trees so as not to damage tree roots. Proper spacing and location are required to allow for plants to reach their mature size and natural shape while avoiding excessive or unnatural pruning.

GROUNDCOVERS

Groundcover plants should generally be a limited part of the landscape plan. When used, evergreen species with low maintenance needs are to be selected. Large grassed lawn areas encompassing a major portion of the site are to be avoided. Grass is appropriate as borders or around entrances and other focal points; grass should always be planted at least a mower’s width away from the base of existing trees. Pine straw or other mulch should be used to stabilize areas and control weed growth.
BUFFERS

Specific buffer standards can be found in LMO Section 16-5-103. The most important component of buffers is the vegetation they contain. Buffers can be classified into three basic categories:

- **UNDISTURBED BUFFERS:** A buffer where all of the existing vegetation is neither removed nor pruned.

- **NATURAL BUFFERS:** A buffer where some existing vegetation is removed or pruned. Some additional plant materials may be added to natural buffers to enhance their appearance. Any additional plantings should be native species or species common to the Island and complimentary to the existing vegetation. Their placement should be designed so that they appear as if they were a part of the existing vegetation.

- **LANDSCAPED BUFFERS:** A buffer where most of the vegetation has been planted. Planting may be more formal and may be shaped by more extensive pruning.
The category of buffer most appropriate for Island Character is the natural buffer. However any of the three categories may be appropriate for Island Character depending on the situation. Undisturbed buffers are appropriate next to undeveloped land, along wetland boundaries, or for wildlife habitat. Landscaped buffers are more suited to limited areas such as around freestanding signs or driveway entrances and along street frontages.

In determining the most appropriate buffer for a project the designer should take into account the adjacent development so as not to depart too dramatically from the neighborhood. It may be necessary to transition the buffer design in order to blend with an adjacent buffer or to vary the category of buffer for site design reasons.

In some cases the LMO allows "structural elements" as part of a buffer. Typically this is a fence or screen of some type. Fences or walls shall comply with LMO Section 16-5-113. When structural elements are used, they must be designed to complement the architectural design of the building(s) and other elements of development on the site by the use of similar materials and detailing. They must be carefully located to avoid existing tree roots. Long straight expanses are not appropriate and the layout of the structural element should be varied for visual interest.
NATIVE PLANTS

In general, native plants or plants that have historically been prevalent on the Island should be utilized. The following lists are just some of the plants that are native to this area and commonly used for landscaping. A list of additional recommended natives can be found in the LMO Appendix C.

OVERSTORY TREES
Live Oak, Sweet Gum, Laurel Oak, Red Maple, Water Oak, Florida Maple, Southern Red Oak, Lobloolly Pine, Southern Magnolia, Long Leaf Pine, Bald Cypress, Slash Pine, Black Gum, Hickories (various species)

UNDERSTORY TREES
Southern Red Cedar, Sassafras, Redbay, Sugarberry, Common Persimmon, American Holly, Dahoon Holly, Yaupon Holly, Cabbage Palmetto, Lobloolly Bay

SHRUBS
Saw Palm, Wax Myrtle, Salt Myrtle, Sparkleberry, Fetterbush, Inkberry, Witch Hazel

SALT MARSH BUFFERS
Black Needle Rush, Sea Ox-Eye, Salt Hay

GRASSES, VINES, AND GROUNDCOVERS

NATIVE PLANTS FOR DUNES
FOR PRIMARY & SECONDARY DUNE:
Sea Oats, Beach Morning Glory, Seaside Panicum

FOR DUNES BEHIND SECONDARY DUNE:
Muhly Grass, Seaside Panicum, Yaupon Holly, Wax Myrtle, Salt Myrtle, Saw Palm, Passion Flower, Beach Evening Primrose, Bear-Grass (Yucca), Camphor Weed, Climbing Butterfly Pea, Prickly Pear Cactus
SOUTHERN RED OAK
FLOATING HEARTS
BLUE FLAG IRIS
SOUTHERN RED OAK
AMERICAN HOLLY
CABBAGE PALMETTO
SEA OX-EYE
SASSAFRASS
CAMPHOR WEED
BALD CYPRESS
TRUMPET VINE
FLOATING HEARTS
MUHLY GRASS
BUTTONBRUSH
SEA OATS
PICKERELWEED
WAX MYRTLE
LIVE OAK
SOFT RUSH
YELLOW JESSAMINE
YAUPON HOLLY
CINNAMON FERN
LOBLOLLY BAY
CLIMBING BUTTERFLY PEA
SAW PALM
SOUTHERN MAGNolia
LOBLOLLY PINE
AMERICAN HOLLY
SOUTHERN MAGNOLIA
LOBLOLLY PINE
MATHEWS COUNTY
ACCESSORY CONSTRUCTION

Thought must be given to the design and placement of elements beyond parking, structures, and landscaping that may be part of a project with the aim being to achieve overall coordination. These other elements may include sculpture & fountains, signs, awnings, utilities and equipment, and lighting.

SCULPTURE AND FOUNTAINS

Projects are encouraged to create interesting outdoor spaces that include appropriate items of visual interest such as sculpture or fountains. While it is not intended to limit artistic expression certain parameters are necessary. The design of such items must be in keeping with the size and scale of the project and not dominate the site. They should generally be subtle in material and color. Fountains should have natural forms that reflect their island location. In the design of sculpture, themes based on the culture and history of the Island are most appropriate.
Signs are an important element to most buildings and developments. Too often no allowance is made in the design of projects for the placement of signs. Many of the principles for good design of structures also apply to the design of signs. Sign design does not begin with a blank sheet of paper. The materials, details, and colors of the building are all starting points for good sign design. In other words, signs should reflect the design of the project they are intended to identify.

The size and number of signs will be determined by LMO Section 16-5-114. Signs should serve to identify the business or development and not act as advertisements. The amount of information on signs shall be no more than is necessary to provide reasonable identification of the business or message to be conveyed.

Signs should provide strong visual interest and include three dimensional design. Only high quality, durable materials such as wood, sign foam, and masonry shall be used. Bright colors and reflective surfaces should be avoided or very limited in size and used as accents rather than predominant design elements.

For façade signs, adequate wall space must be provided in a location that will allow the sign to function properly while also appear as if it “belongs” with the building. The sign should be placed within a single architectural element and the colors, materials, and details should compliment the structure's design. In good sign design the façade signs appear as an integral component of the building design rather than as an afterthought. Tenant signs at shopping centers and office complexes should be uniform in design and placed on the façade of the tenant space.

Freestanding or monument signs should be placed in logical locations near the project’s entrance and their design must complement the architectural design of the building(s) and other elements of development on the site. Monument signs with one sign face shall be finished on “back” side. Adequate landscaping of a type and scale complementary to the overall landscape plan must be provided to integrate the sign into the site and provide a unified design.
Good sign design should apply to all signs on a site including monument signs, directional signs, and facade signs. Per LMO Section 16-5-114 a sign system is required for planned unit developments, commercial developments, office complexes, and shopping centers. A successful sign system will integrate all sign types on site in a unified system of materials, colors, shapes, and sizes that are compatible with the architecture and other site elements. Tenants may be required to select colors and fonts for their signs that are different than their typical logo colors and fonts in order to comply with the approved sign system.

Lighting, if used to illuminate the sign, must be completely shielded from streets and pathways. Light-reflecting backgrounds shall not be used but light-reflecting lettering or halo lighting may be used. When lighting a façade sign the type of light fixture selected should complement the architectural style of the structure and the facade light fixtures and not be added solely to illuminate the sign.
LIGHTING

Hilton Head Island is noted for its lack of glaring excessive lights. Strict requirements for general site lighting are specified in LMO Section 16-5-108. However, other decorative type lighting is allowed if limited in scope and properly designed. The goal is to add to the visual quality of the development without detracting from the beauty of the night sky. Such lighting may include concealed low wattage landscape up lights for significant trees or shrubbery at an entryway. Low bollard type lighting can be used to illuminate walkways and drive aisles. Important architectural elements can be softly illuminated to add emphasis at night. When lighting trees up lighting is preferred. Any light fixtures mounted in a tree must follow best management practices to avoid damage to the tree.

Incandescent lamps are preferred over metal halide. The same type of light source must be used for the same or similar types of lighting on site. The style and finish of exterior lighting, including fixtures and poles, should be selected to complement the details and materials of the structure and other site elements. A consistent finish should be selected for fixtures of similar types throughout the site. A coordinated lighting plan is a component of Island Character.

Six fixtures and poles have been pre-approved by the Design Review Board for use in overall lighting plans and can be used for site lighting without additional DRB review however the project’s context and overall design character should be considered when selecting one of these fixtures. The approved fixtures/ poles include:

- Baltimore
- Small Shoebox
- Hagerstown
- Salem
- Large Shoebox
- Pima
AWNINGS

Awnings may be appropriate design elements if integral to the architectural design of the structure and not a dominant feature. If used they should have substantial structural support such as brackets and not just metal pipes. Only high quality fade-resistant fabric may be used and periodic replacement must be ensured. Color and pattern choices are critical in designing a successful awning. Bright colors or elaborate patterns are generally not desirable. Awnings should not be incorporated solely to provide space for sign copy.

KIOSKS

Kiosks may be used as a temporary accessory element and should be integral to the site. Kiosk structures should take their architectural cues from the other structures on the site and should include similar or compatible details. Only high quality materials may be used. Colors should be nature blending and in keeping with other site structures.
All utility or service lines must be underground or concealed within the structure. Exposed wires, pipes, or conduits are not acceptable. Any transformers, meters, compressors, or utility cabinets must be painted a nature blending color, i.e. brown or green, be located in a non-prominent location, and be screened from view with landscaping and/or walls or fences.

Solid waste receptacles must be located in a non-prominent location and screened from view. In most cases a fence as described elsewhere in this guide (see page 22) will be required. Enclosures should be designed to allow adequate air flow as needed but not allow visibility into the enclosure.

Vending machines or other such equipment if placed on the exterior of a structure should be concealed from view of the street or parking area and must not include internal illumination.

Enclosures for utilities and equipment may be attached to the building or located elsewhere on site. The attached service yard conceals utility cabinets and trash receptacles in a design that is integrated into the overall design of the structure and other site elements through the use of common colors and materials.
CREDITS

Tower Beach Site Analysis; JK Tiller Associates (page 6)
Tower Beach Conceptual Master Plan; JK Tiller Associates (page 6)
Conceptual Parking Lot Layout; Wood+Partners (page 8)
Harris Teeter Storm Water Retention Pond; JK Tiller Associates (page 10)
Building Elevation; McCleskey & Associates (page 13)
Palmetto Dunes Gate House Conceptual Architecture; Lee & Parker Architects (page 14)
Shelter Cove Towne Centre Conceptual Elevations; MSTSD (page 16)
Palmetto Dunes POA Office Landscape Plan; Witmer Jones Keefer (page 18)
Pre-Approved light fixtures/poles; Palmetto Electric (page 30)

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