



HENRY McMASTER
GOVERNOR

August 18, 2020

Mr. Kevin B. Mack
Vice Chairman
Beaufort County Zoning Board of Appeals
100 Ribaut Road
Beaufort, SC 29902

Dear Mr. Mack:

I write to express my concerns regarding the proposed development of a large-scale luxury resort on Bay Point Island and its potential detrimental impact on South Carolina's natural resources and the taxpayers of Beaufort County.

South Carolina's mountains, beaches, sea islands and marshes are among the most beautiful in the nation, drawing 29 million people to South Carolina each year and driving a \$22.6 billion dollar tourism industry – one of our largest. We are stewards of these assets, and it is our duty to protect them in a manner that is sustainable, responsible and consistent with the incomparable cultural and environmental heritage which distinguishes our state from others. I believe the proposed development is incompatible with these goals.

Bay Point Island is currently zoned as a T1 Natural Preserve, which allows ecotourism only as a special use where the project meets enumerated criteria. Specifically, such zones are intended to "preserve areas that contain sensitive habitats, open space, and limited agricultural uses" and are not intended to contain buildings aside from single-family dwellings or civic buildings. A luxury resort – with 60 bungalows and 11 additional buildings with four spas, three restaurants and more – is plainly inconsistent with these requirements. Even a smaller version of this project would not be acceptable, in my opinion. Quite simply, I don't think such developments are what our people had in mind when they envisioned "ecotourism."

This development is further inconsistent with the 2010 Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan, which clearly emphasizes the goal of protecting "the character and quality of existing communities and ensur[ing] that new developments share the characteristics and quality unique to Beaufort County."

In addition, multiple environmental factors weigh against allowing the development of Bay Point Island. Notably, Bay Point Island is designated as a national "Important Bird Area," providing sanctuary to between 5,000 and 8,000 shorebirds, including species of piping plover, semiplumated plover, red knot, sanderling, short-billed dowitcher, whimbrel, willet, western sandpiper, Wilson's plover, dunlin, and American oystercatcher. It further serves as a nesting habitat for loggerhead sea turtles, which regularly visit Bay Point Island to hatch their young. This is only made possible by virtue of the island's undisturbed, pristine nature which would be irreparably harmed by the construction, traffic, activities and other impacts associated with such developments.

Further, Bay Point Island is subject to significant erosion. Its changing shoreline would seem to make a development project impractical and potentially unsustainable. Moreover, the infrastructure requirements attendant to the construction of a 60-bungalow resort would likely place a heavy burden on Beaufort County – and, by extension, its taxpayers. Energy, sewage and water needs do not appear to be sufficiently accounted for in the proposal submitted to the Beaufort County Council. Beaufort County residents could end up paying for the tremendous beach management costs resulting from erosion, as well as the emergency services necessary to constructing such a project.

Finally, Bay Point Island's cultural significance cannot be overstated. It is a site of tremendous importance to the Gullah-Geechee community, which has used the island for subsistence fishing for many decades. Ms. Marquette Goodwine, who was elected Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah-Geechee nation, has expressed reservations about the potential damage this development would cause to the robust cultural fabric of the Gullah community. I agree with her assessment. This is a living history we do not want to lose.

For all of these reasons, I urge the Beaufort County Zoning Board of Appeals to reject this latest attempt to develop this beautiful barrier island. The project's tremendous impact on wildlife and surrounding communities cannot be squared with principles of fiscal responsibility and our shared mission of protecting the treasures of our state for future generations.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry McMaster". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and "M".

Henry McMaster

HDM/jcc