

## Sea, Sand and Sustainability at Seabrook Island

**Location:** Seabrook Island, SC

**Population:** 2,000

**Size:** 2,400 acres

**Type of property:** Private community

**Type of membership:**  
Sustainable Communities Program

**Member since:** July 2011

**Certified Since:** December 2017



Seabrook Island, South Carolina

Seabrook Island, South Carolina is a 2,400

acre, private barrier island located approximately 23 miles southwest of Charleston. This coastal island is immersed in natural splendor, and is home to a lush maritime forest, serene marshes, and pristine beaches.

Over 20 years ago, this community started, and ultimately embraced the effort to become more sustainable. Initially, Seabrook Island was involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf, and the Seabrook Island Club achieved certification in this program 1996. Yet after achieving Audubon International certification on their golf course, the work around sustainability didn't stop. Instead, Seabrook Island wanted to do more, and they decided to look more holistically at their entire community's relationship with sustainability.

In 2011, the Seabrook Island Property Owner's Association (SIPOA) joined the Sustainable Communities Program, and a few years later they became the first private community in South Carolina to achieve certification. To become certified,

Sustainable Communities Program members go through three stages of membership, and in Stage 1 members establish a baseline assessment of the community focusing on environment, quality of life, and economic vitality. The team at Seabrook Island hit the ground running, and they put together a robust report, making the case to focus on sustainability in an interdisciplinary fashion. In September of 2012, SIPOA completed Stage 1 of the program, taking just over a year.

In Stage 2, the community's sustainability goals are incorporated into a Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The community driven Long-Term Sustainability Plan needs to have timelines and measurable goals addressing multiple focal areas, including wildlife conservation and



Seabrook Island takes special care to protect their sea turtle population, and this is one of the hatchlings headed to the ocean for the first time.

habitat enhancement, water conservation, energy efficiency, health, and transportation. Seabrook Island's plan demonstrates their commitment to the future of their community and identifies 36 goals across 14 focal areas with specific implementation strategies and indicators associated with each one. Seabrook Island has achieved a high level of success with the goals outlined in the plan, including the following:

- **Healthy Living:** In an effort to promote healthy lifestyles, all SIPOA, Town, and Seabrook Island Club properties are designated smoke-free areas.
- **Education:** Seabrook Island hopes to engage residents and visitors in environmental stewardship activities, and to cultivate a deeper understanding of sustainability. To this end, the Seabrook Island Natural History Group offers multiple educational events every year on such issues as stormwater education, boaters-maritime/aquatic issues, and regional land use planning/development issues. In addition, they also sponsor a "Behind the Scenes" workshop to tour Seabrook Island infrastructure facilities that includes all SIPOA sites, the Seabrook Island Utility Commission Water/Sewer Treatment Facility, etc. to raise awareness of what is involved in keeping the community running.
- **Resource Use:** Seabrook Island has a comprehensive lighting plan, which includes a commitment to minimizing light pollution, and installing energy efficient and dark skies/turtle friendly lighting. To help meet this goal, SIPOA landscape and median lighting has been switched to LEDs and dark sky lighting has been installed in the Community Center parking lot.
- **Planning, Zoning, Building & Development:** Seabrook Island has a goal to reuse and renovate existing facilities to reduce building costs and impacts and has therefore enacted a fix-it-first policy. Staying in line with this mission,



Seabrook Island is home to 36 holes of championship golf—The Seabrook Island Club .



To support farming on Seabrook Island, SIPOA offers 55 garden plots for owners and the food is often shared with others in the community. There are also bee hives in the garden area that are overseen by local residents in cooperation with the Charleston Area Beekeepers Association.

the interior of the Oyster Catcher Community Center was renovated in 2016. Additionally, in 2017, sail shades were added to the Lake House pool, demonstrating a decision to use sustainable materials to reduce harmful sun exposure, eliminate the costs associated with annual umbrella replacement, and to improve aesthetics.

- **Food Sourcing:** To help maximize the purchase of locally-grown produce, plants, meats and cheese, the Seabrook Island Club menu is composed of not only healthy choices, but the use of local suppliers is also noted on the menu. SIPOA also provides information on farmers markets and local businesses that sell and deliver locally sourced fresh and cured meats in their new resident orientation materials.

- **Volunteerism & Civic Engagement:** Volunteerism is exceptional in all community related groups. For example, the Adopt-A-Highway volunteers clean a 3-mile segment of road on a quarterly basis. Additionally, the Turtle Patrol has almost 100 volunteers each year. A searchable list of all volunteer opportunities on Seabrook Island and surrounding communities is available on the SIPOA website.
- **Ecosystem Protection:** To preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, SIPOA continues to maintain high beach quality. In 2016, Seabrook Island was named “Best Restored Beach” by the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association. The beach management plan is updated annually, and SIPOA and the Town participate in South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control inspections regarding beach health.
- **Aging in Place:** Seabrook Island offers programs to keep owners physically and mentally active. There are several local agencies that assist the elderly with home maintenance, travel to doctors appointments, and respite care.



Left to Right: Christine Kane (Audubon International) awards Julie McCulloch (Seabrook Island Property Owners Association) Audubon International Sustainable Communities Certification at the South Carolina Sustainable Communities Press Event in March 2018.

Heather Paton, SIPOA Executive Director, is to be commended for her relentless drive and passion to this process, and she was recognized for her efforts with the Environmental Planning and Stewardship Award upon completion of Seabrook Island’s Long-Term Sustainability Plan. In addition, Heather had a dedicated sustainability team that offered their support and expertise to the process. Seabrook Island has made tremendous strides in educating their community about sustainability, in providing opportunities for residents, local organizations, and stakeholders to get involved in their sustainability efforts, and in beginning to make sustainability an integral part of the way the community functions. “SIPOA residents have been tremendously supportive of the efforts to focus on preservation, conservation and sustain-

ability within our community,” said Julie McCulloch, SIPOA President. “The hard work and many months of meetings and synthesis of materials and views has firmly established our relationship with Audubon International, culminating in this exceptional award.”

Seabrook Island Property Owners Association (SIPOA) is the governing body of the Seabrook Island Development. The Association was established in 1984 and has many dedicated volunteer Board and Committee members as well as a staff of 12 full-time employees who oversee daily operations and management. The Association is responsible for general governance, infrastructure, facilities maintenance, security, compliance and community activities.

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Interpretative signs highlighting information about natural features are in place at boardwalk entries in six locations.