

**TOWN OF SULLIVAN’S ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, February 11, 2015**

A regular meeting of the Town of Sullivan’s Island Planning Commission was held at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, February 11, 2015 at Town Hall, 2050-B Middle Street, all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been satisfied. Present were Commission members Chair Visser, Vice Chair (acting) Hal Currey, Sydney Cook, Carl Hubbard and Manda Poletti. Staff members present: Administrator Benke (portion of meeting), Zoning Administrator Henderson, Asst. to Administrator Darrow and Building Official Robinson.

I. Call to Order. Chair Visser called the meeting to order, stated press and public were duly notified pursuant to state law and the Commission had a quorum (Carlsen Huey, excused absence). Chair Visser noted Mr. Bennett resigned from the Commission and thanked him for his service. Approximately 20 members of the public were present; no media.

II. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Chair Visser moved to approve the February 11, 2015 agenda allowing for a presentation from Jay Butfiloski, SC Department of Natural Resources first. Seconded by Mr. Currey; MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

III. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Currey moved to approve the January 14, 2015 minutes as presented; seconded by Ms. Poletti; MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

IV. Items for Information

**1. Special Guest: Jay Butfiloski, SC Department of Natural Resources
Furbearer Project Coordinator, Columbia, SC**

Administrator Benke provided a brief background of coyote presence on the Island, remarking the Town received its first calls of coyote sightings approximately 3 years ago (circa 2012).

Mr. Butfiloski provided a brief overview of coyote presence throughout SC (present in all counties), the U.S. (present in all states except Hawaii) and his assessment of Sullivan’s Island’s challenges with coyote management, those being:

- The marsh, beachfront and wide spaces between homes offer many places for all animals (deer, raccoons, feral cats, coyotes, etc.) to hide and navigate across the Island.
- Leg traps: considered the most effective coyote trap but can be problematic in a suburban area (potential danger to youth, pets, and people walking along the beach or through beach path areas at dusk/night).

- Firearms: Town ordinance does not allow residents to discharge firearms on the Island. Discharging firearms is inherently dangerous on this Island given the level of visitors and beachgoers, particularly near the beach/dune line at night.
- Eradication of all coyotes is not attainable, long-range. Cited evidence of coyote migration statistics where tagged animals were found long distances from origination point (excess of 200 miles). Coyotes will continue to come to the Island. Eradication might provide temporary relief but can provide a false sense of security to residents/visitors. One can never know when coyotes will return.
- A strong coyote management program is more feasible.

Thereafter, he held a Question/Answer session with Commissioners and residents on coyote management and coyotes in general.

Commission Questions

Ms. Poletti: Noted there have been approximately 30 coyote sightings in the last month. Asked if this was statistically high.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Noted SCDNR does not statistically analyze the number of sightings per month state-wide. A number of coyote sightings have been reported statewide in the last twelve months with sightings usually increasing from late October–early March, due to coyote mating and pup habitat instincts.
- He observed that, without tagging coyotes, one is not able to determine whether the 30 sightings on Sullivan’s Island are 30 unique coyote sightings or fewer coyotes seen multiple times by different people in the same month period.
- Therefore, it is not meaningful to see 30 sightings in a month. It would be meaningful, however, to see 30 sightings of more domesticated and/or aggressive coyotes. The coyote behavior is more meaningful than the number of sightings.

Ms. Cook: Asked for clarification of the meaning for the term “aggressive” coyote and the coyote interaction with other pets (dogs).

Mr. Butfiloski:

- “Aggressive” means not skittish when a human approaches a coyote. Normal coyote behavior is to retreat when challenged by humans.
- Coyotes interact with other dogs as a dog would, except a coyote might see small dogs as prey/food source. Coyotes are wild animals, of the dog species.

Mr. Currey: Noted the Town has a fairly good, well established dog ordinance policy. He asked if leg traps posed a high risk for pets and whether he could put a trap in his yard. He asked for an example of other SC communities with a similar density of coyotes.

Mr. Visser: Asked for clarification that a captured coyote on the Island could not be relocated, it would have to be terminated, and, that discharging a firearm within Town limits is illegal.

Administrator Benke: Clarified that Town ordinances do not allow the discharge of firearm within Town limits (except police).

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Checking leg traps frequently each and every day is critical to avoid serious injury to pets.
- SCDNR allows homeowners to trap within 100 yards of a home without a DNR permit, provided the trapping still occurs on the homeowner's property.
- Reiterated that homeowners are not allowed to relocate trapped coyotes (per DNR) or shoot them (per Town ordinance).
- Kiawah is a good reference for the Town as it has similar coyote densities

Mr. Visser: Noted that residents have challenges in disposing of coyotes if they engage in trapping.

Administrator Benke: Noted many residents choose an animal control service to capture coyotes and dispose of them off-Island.

Mr. Currey: Asked how many injuries and/or fatalities were caused by coyotes in the United States.

Mr. Butfiloski: Noted there was one coyote attack in Pacoulet, South Carolina (circa 2009) when a 7 year old child was waiting at a bus stop. In that incident, the coyote was rabid.

Mr. Hubbard: Asked if the practice of trapping coyotes would hurt or harm efforts to deter coyote presence on the Island.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Noted there is a theory that an established social group of coyotes in a habitat will deter/repel coyotes seeking to migrate into the habitat.
- He noted he could not provide concrete evidence to support this theory, but observed nature will fill a vacuum.

Mr. Visser: Asked if rabies is a concern for coyotes.

Mr. Butfiloski: Noted DNR does record animal bites for rabies but does not track the intensity of rabies, in general, in an area known to have active rabies cases. Charleston County is acknowledged to have active rabies within its boundary.

Mr. Visser: Asked about measures to exclude coyotes from private property, to include fencing materials and heights.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Coyotes are opportunistic animals and will likely dig under a fence instead of scaling over a fence to get into a yard.

- The type of fencing material is more significant than the height when it comes to deterring coyotes.
 - Chain link and wooden fences with big plank gaps and/or horizontal slats are easier for coyotes to scale.
 - Vinyl or a smooth wood is harder to scale.
 - A fence apron of two feet underground will be the most helpful in deterring coyotes from yards.

Ms. Poletti: Asked if increasing fence heights would be helpful to deterring coyotes.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Noted that, if all yards were fenced on the Island, the fence height might be an issue. However, coyotes are lazy and will likely move on to a non-fenced yard for either food or to navigate across the Island.
- He noted that the biggest attraction for coyotes is food; residents should remove food in yards.

Public Questions:

Milton Langley, 1618 Middle, SI

- Asked if coyotes typically overstay their food source and, if so, will coyotes get more aggressive or leave.

Mr. Butfiloski: Sometimes coyotes will overstay food sources at the onset of establishing a habitat; however, they will migrate to balance the available food.

Scott Bluestein, 2408 Goldbug, SI

- Noted SCDNR recommends fence heights of six (6') feet.

Mr. Butfiloski: The 6' fence height applies to rural areas with livestock situations.

Susan Middaugh, 2420 Raven Drive, SI

- Asked for the typical size and weight of a coyote, particularly as it relates to a coyote likely attacking a dog.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Noted coyotes migrated eastward from the western areas. Some moved north and another genetic line moved south. Northern species are found to be bigger than southern species. In the South, a typical coyote is between 30-35lb (male) and 20-25 lb (female); however they look larger due to their fur coating.
- He noted that any dog might attack another, regardless of size. The same can be said of a coyote.

Mark Howard, 1820 Central, SI

- Asked how long coyote pups remain with the mother and whether this is a factor in the overall size of coyote nests on the Island.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Young pups usually disperse from the habitat in the fall (September/October), although a few may remain depending upon the food supply.

Chuck Jacobsen, 1509 Middle, SI

- Asked the significance for SCDNR recommending a 6' fence in rural areas, as opposed to a shorter or taller fence.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- In rural areas, fences are often constructed of webbed materials (woven wire or chain link), with these materials providing a ladder for coyotes to climb to get to a plentiful food source (livestock). Researchers have determined that these types of fences, when constructed 6' high, act as a deterrent to coyotes that do not naturally want to scale very high off the ground.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I'On, SI

- Referenced his letter to the Commission (received as correspondence for tonight's meeting): questioned the interplay of varying fence heights (high-low) and how that might impact coyote climbing/scaling activity.
- Noted that a fence or other solid surface approximately 3-4' could act as a springboard for a coyote to jump over the top of a higher fence.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- His known experience with coyotes climbing over fences relates to fences for livestock, not smaller front yard fences.
- He noted that coyotes have a strong motivation to climb a fence when it contains small livestock like sheep. He reiterated a coyote would be more likely to either abandon a fence or try to dig under it, as opposed to scaling it, especially if it is made of a smooth surface material. He opined that southern coyote species will most likely not clear the top of a 5' fence.

Alice Morrissey, 1652 Thompson, SI

- Asked whether barbed wire or electric fences would help deter coyotes.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Noted barbed wire or electric fences would deter coyotes but there were trade-offs to using this type of material (aesthetic and other pet/child safety considerations).

Andy Benke, 2320 Myrtle Avenue, SI

- Asked if coyotes were opportunistic feeders or hunt.

Mr. Butfiloski:

- Coyotes are wild animals and will display both hunting and opportunistic feeding behavior, as do all predators. A coyote will usually seek easy food, though.

Planning Commission Questions

Ms. Cook:

- Asked how many rabid dogs on average are sighted in SC and if residents should expect to see coyotes stalking children

Mr. Butfiloski:

- SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) is an agency that records rabid animal bites; however, he does not know of an agency that tracks every case of rabies in SC.
- Coyotes will not approach and interact with children unless they are in a community with a very high tolerance level for coyotes. SC communities are known to have a more aggressive stance on coyote management.

Ms. Poletti: Reported a recent incident (within last month) where she observed a big black coyote on her block, well beyond the regular size limits, and asked if a newer mixed coyote breed might be in SC now.

Mr. Butfiloski: Suggested the black coyote might be a genetic aberration due to a recessive gene when a coyote ancestor mated with a domestic animal.

Mr. Currey: Asked for clarification as to how many adults or children have been killed by coyotes in SC.

Mr. Butfiloski: No deaths have been reported. The one attack (2009) of the child in Pacoulet, SC by a rabid coyote is the only recorded incident. He noted doctors are required to report animal bites to SCDHEC.

Chair Visser thanked Mr. Butfiloski for his time; Administrator Benke left the meeting with Mr. Butfiloski.

V. Items for Consideration

- 1 Coyote Control Measures: Sullivan’s Island Town Council requests consideration of increasing fence heights and employing other protective measures to safeguard against coyotes intrusion on private property.**

Zoning Administrator Henderson:

Reviewed current fence ordinance guidelines (Section 21-139) and the history behind its current height restriction (before the Town’s 2005 comprehensive review/modification of the Zoning Ordinance):

- Ordinance cites, “Tall privacy fences are prohibited for being incompatible with the Island’s informal character”
- Currently 4 feet (4’) maximum height for fences in the front yard and/or within 10 feet of the property line.
- Currently 5 feet (5’) maximum height for fences in the rear yard and if more than 10 feet from the property line.
- Fence construction: no chain link; must remain 25% open across the plain of the fence

Before 2005 Zoning Ordinance changes:

- Fence heights were a maximum of eight feet (8'): constructed of 4' high fence with an additional wire extension up to 4' located on top of main fence.

Commission and public asked extensive questions and offered comments (letters on this topic were received from residents Wayne Stelljes and Ed Fava, noted in correspondence below).

Commission Discussion

Mr. Currey: Commented he was unsure what type of fence and fence height would guarantee a coyote could not get into a yard. He reiterated Mr. Butfiloski's comments that coyotes are opportunistic animals. He does not see the demonstrated need to have a large, tall fence around every house.

Chair Visser: Noted Mr. Stelljes' comments in his letter about objects and materials that would allow animals to get in or out of a yard. Questioned how a homeowner could keep other pets or animals (including coyotes) out of a yard of any height, based upon Mr. Stelljes' premise.

Mr. Currey: Questioned whether anybody has tried to construct an ordinance to keep coyotes off of personal property and done so successfully.

Zoning Administrator Henderson:

- Noted Staff could reach out to other municipalities through its list serves if Commission needed this information.
- Noted the Town Staff can currently allow a homeowner to include appendages to fences (such as a wire) without changing the ordinance regarding fence heights.

Building Official Robinson:

- Noted homeowners can install electrified fence material along the top of a fence to keep animals out of it. This activity is already being done on the Island.

A discussion was held regarding the approval of electric wire shock fencing for homeowners to use to prevent animals from going over fences. Town Staff advised that electric fencing was currently in use by some homeowners and that it was compliant with current Town ordinances. It was noted that electric wire shock fencing is an option discussed in SC DNR advisory documents as useful in preventing animals from scaling rural agricultural livestock fencing.

Chair Visser asked if any Commissioner was inclined to raise fence heights at present.

Ms. Poletti: Noted that, based on the feedback from Mr. Butfiloski, raising fence heights would not be the solution to keeping coyotes off private property.

Public Questions/Comments

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I'On, SI

- Does not support wired/electric fences: inappropriate for a residential area; expressed concern about children exposed to electric wiring.

Scott Bluestein, 2408 Goldbug Avenue, SI

- Recounted his family's recent experience hearing a pack of coyotes kill an animal near their property/marsh area in the last few weeks (harrowing experience). He has also seen the same coyote that Ms. Poletti mentioned.
- Noted coyotes have been stalking his dogs at dusk, despite his 5' fence, lying outside the fence line keenly observing them. He has found scat in his front and back yard, evidence the coyotes linger often on his property.
- Expressed concern for children and animals. Submitted one pet or one child is too much of a sacrifice to ask.
- Higher fences do work, as noted in DNR literature for rural areas, and would give pets a chance to avoid coyotes. His request is for a 7' fence height for his rear yard, a request he made based upon extensive study of this topic.

Paul Boehm, 1309 Middle, SI

- Asked about the gap between fences and making the picket gaps narrower, but still compliant with current ordinances, to deter coyotes scaling them.

Susan Middaugh, 2420 Raven, SI

- Noted that when her children were smaller, her family had an electrified fence in the backyard to keep the dog from escaping. In her experience, the children steered clear of the electric fence.

Commission Discussion:

Chair Visser asked Mr. Scott Bluestein whether his family has considered electric options for the fence.

Mr. Bluestein:

- Replied he has not researched it, but his first question would be the life expectancy on this Island (rust).
- Expressed concern about the aesthetic appeal of wired fencing, noting the fence he constructed was well planned and expensively constructed to add value to his property and the neighborhood, not detract from it.

Chair Visser read highlights of the letter from Ed Fava—expressing no support for increasing fence heights.

Mr. Currey: Suggested Staff could sketch out renderings or collect photos of how fences would look with wire affixed to the top. Suggested Staff should research other communities with similar circumstances.

Ms. Cook:

- Submitted a wired fence's appearance is irrelevant as wire fixtures mounted atop fences are currently allowed.
- Stated she would defer to Mr. Butfiloski's expertise and noted that increased fence heights will not guarantee coyotes do not get into yards.

MOTION: Ms. Cook made a motion to recommend to Council that there be no change to the fence height ordinance; seconded by Mr. Hubbard. MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

VI. Items for Information

Staff Update on Town Projects: Staff provided an oral update on various Town projects for Commission's information (no action taken)

Next Meeting – (6:30pm) Wednesday, March 11, 2015 at Town Hall

Correspondence & General Public Comments –

Two items of written correspondence referenced earlier in meeting, relating to coyote management and residential fence heights.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I'On Avenue, SI

Ed Fava, 2424 Myrtle Avenue, SI

- Both letters expressed support for current fence height ordinances and requested Commission and Council not increase residential fence heights.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:25p.m. (Mr. Currey motioned; Ms. Poletti seconded; unanimously passed).

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Darrow
Asst. to Administrator

Approved at the Wednesday, March 11, 2015 Planning Commission Meeting