

Chapter 3: Historic Resources

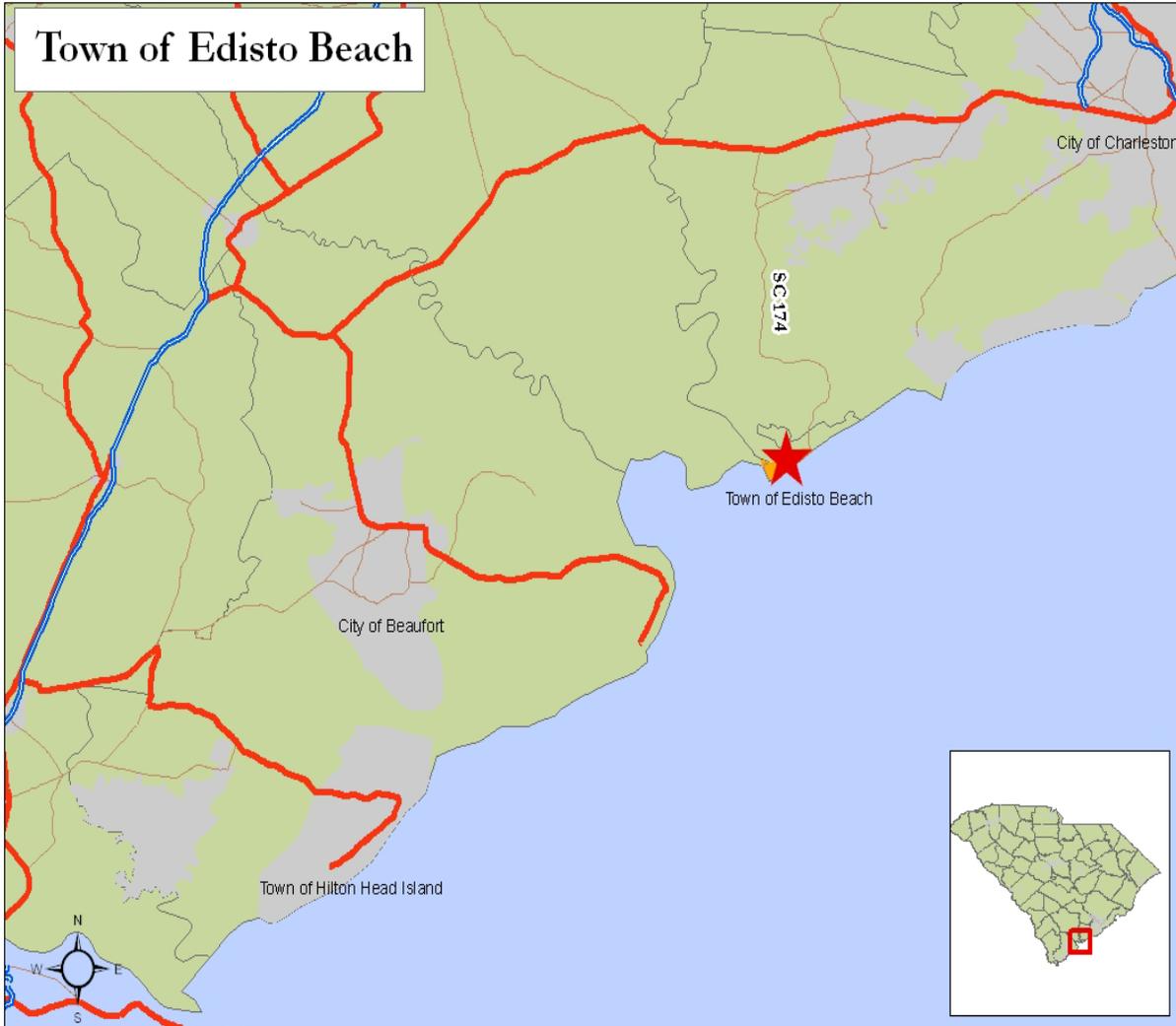
3.1 Setting

The Town of Edisto Beach is on a six-mile long barrier island at the mouth of the Edisto River, Between Charleston and Hilton Head Island (Map 3.1). The beach, undivided by fences, stretches the length of the Town and into the state park at the eastern end of the barrier island. The Town of Edisto Beach is separated from Edisto Island by Big Bay and Scott Creeks. Approximately 25 percent of the Town's total acreage is comprised of salt marsh along these creeks. This combination of sandy beaches and rich salt marshes provides the Town of Edisto Beach with a unique and beautiful natural setting.

The Town of Edisto Beach is characterized as a quiet, family-oriented community, without the carnival-like, commercial atmosphere found in and around many other beach resort areas. The vast majority of the Town is occupied by single-family homes, many used as rental, or seasonal homes.

The eastern end of the barrier island lies within Edisto Beach State Park, with access from Highway 174, as well as directly from the Town. According to state park officials, the park encompasses 1,225 acres and ocean- and marsh-side camping sites as well as cabins, picnic areas, and nature and hiking trails. Edisto Beach State Park is one of the most heavily visited of the South Carolina state parks, with over 250,000 visitors each year. Table 3.1 shows the trends of visitors, which hit a high point in 2005-06. The decrease in visitors may be a result of the gas prices that spiked in recent years, and the economic downturn in late 2007 which has become more pronounced at the writing of this update.

Map 3.1



Edisto in the Region

Table 3.1

Visitors to Edisto Beach State Park

	Total Visitors	Out of State Visitors	Vehicle Count
2007-08	249,312	82,827	62,328
2006-07	242,428	83,870	63,107
2005-06	331,012	110,040	N/A

3.2 Surrounding Area

The only land approach to the Town of Edisto Beach is across Edisto Island, through Charleston County. This area is still predominantly rural in character, and agricultural in economy, but increasingly, the large plantations, some of them of historic importance, are being developed as high end residential subdivisions. The 2002 population of the Charleston County portion of Edisto Island (not including the Town of Edisto Beach) was only 1,559 persons; this is expected to double by the year 2015 (based on projections by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments). Over the past decade a number of small commercial developments, to serve visitors to Edisto and also residents, has developed along SC 174 approaching the causeway to Edisto Beach.

3.3 History and Historic Resources

In common with most Atlantic Ocean barrier islands, Edisto Beach was not a permanent settlement for either Native Americans or early European settlers. The barrier islands did function, though, as very early summer resorts for both groups, providing opportunities for seasonal hunting and fishing.

Initial development of the area was begun by Edisto Beach, Inc. in the mid-twenties, but growth was slow, and the cottages found on the Beach had neither electricity nor indoor toilets. The late 1930's brought the paving of Palmetto Boulevard and the opening of the state park, which accelerated growth in the resort. Property owners continued to build homes along the oceanfront, and some began building on the opposite side of Palmetto in the "jungle". By the end of the 1930s, the Beach boasted a

tea room, a bowling alley, and other amenities, and the area was so popular that requests to rent cottages had to be placed months in advance.

The hurricane of 1940 wiped away most of these signs of progress. In addition to destroying or severely damaging nearly all the beach front homes, the storm washed away the state park buildings, part of the highway and sidewalks. Most of the dunes themselves were destroyed, their sand carried either into the jungle or the ocean. The popularity of the area was such that the Town was quickly rehabilitated, the highway rebuilt, and the beach stabilized with groins. New homes were built along the beach and the marsh, and side streets cut into the interior of the Town. A relatively large number of those homes and cottages remain and are a crucial part of the visual appeal of Edisto Beach. They exemplify the special traditional summer coastal resort environment with which the Town provides its visitors and residents.

Today the Town of Edisto Beach retains the close-knit, neighborly atmosphere from the early days of its development, despite some larger scale developments that occurred during the past 10 to 20 years. The Town remains off the beaten path. It's a hidden treasure rediscovered by each generation which comes to walk the sandy beaches looking for shark's teeth, explore the jungle paths, and fish the surf.

3.4 Historic Resource Preservation Goals and Strategies

The actions and decisions made by private property owners, Town Council, and Planning Commission now will decide the long-term fate of Edisto Beach's historic resources. The Planning Commission has begun to ensure the character of Edisto Beach remains unchanged, and they should strive to continue their work through a revised zoning ordinance and other regulations which incentivize preservation.

To maintain the attractiveness and unique identity of Edisto Beach to residents, visitors and investors, the Town should conduct a historic resources survey. The survey should inventory all properties that may be considered worthy of preservation, and the final report should be a comprehensive effort that has included members of the community in its development. The historic resources survey can be used to guide the Town in defining "historic" in a place as unique as Edisto, and it will illustrate the need to explore incentives for preservation.

Goals

- Promote building options that incentivize preservation of the historic fabric and sense of place in Edisto Beach, thereby maintaining the Town’s uniqueness.
- Support efforts to involve and educate all members of the community—full-time residents, part-time residents, visitors, investors and developers—in the process of preserving the Town of Edisto Beach’s historic resources and its essential character.
- Commit to an ongoing community education and communication program so that the advantages and benefits of preserving the Town’s historic resources are clearly understood by residents, business owners, builders, developers and visitors. In doing this, the Town will help to define what is “historic” by Edisto’s standards, and what sites they most want to preserve

Recommendations

- Conduct a historic resources inventory/survey in order to identify all structures, streets, and neighborhoods that should be protected. The Town should work with property owners to recognize particular structures and districts to clearly signal their value to the community. Furthermore, the Planning Commission, Town Council and the community should work together to define “historic” for Edisto Beach.
- Provide incentives through development regulations and an updated zoning ordinance to encourage compatible new development and adaptive re-use of existing structures. Included will be provisions and incentives to discourage demolition and incentives to encourage appropriate infill and rehabilitation of and additions to existing buildings.