

Sea Pines Community Services Associates

Landscape Survey Results



UNIVERSITY OF
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BEAUFORT

Lowcountry and Resort Islands
Tourism Institute

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Executive Summary

Sample size

Total number of survey participants was 571. Over half of the survey participants reporting living in Sea Pines for 12 months out of the year. Of those that stated they only live part of the year at Sea Pines, the most likely season was spring (31.3%) or fall (28.7%) and least likely to live there in the summer or winter seasons.

Satisfied overall with current landscaping

Survey participants were mostly satisfied or very satisfied with the current landscaping. This was over 70% for the Greenwood Gate and close to 65% for the Ocean Gate. There was a higher percentage at the Ocean Gate for those who were undecided or did not have enough information to form an opinion than the Greenwood Gate. This may be due the perception of the official entrance is the Greenwood Gate since it is the location of the visitor center and the Ocean Gate may be used less often.

Preferences for landscape design

As a collective whole, the survey participants prefer design type A – natural for most types of landscape settings within Sea Pines. The exceptions to this were the landscape treatment comparisons Sets 1 and 5. Set 1 was an entrance and set 5 displayed curbside shrubs and landscaped flowers. In these two sets, there was a preference for a mix of the two types of landscape design. This is further illustrated when looking at preferences after the survey participants had the opportunity to read the descriptions of the two design types. Here there was also a split with 49.3% preferring design type A – natural and 41.1% preferring a mix of the two design types.

Differences in residents

There were no statistical differences between 12 month and seasons of residency in their preferences of landscape design. However, there are some descriptive differences.

With Set 1 treatment comparisons, 12 month and summer residents prefer a mix of landscape types while winter, fall and spring residents prefer design type A. In the Set 5 treatment comparisons, there was an almost equal presence between design type A and a mixture of the two design types. The 12 month and fall residents were almost evenly split in their preference for design type A and a mixture of both types. The winter residents were the only group to have more of a preference for a mixture of both landscape designs and the summer and spring residents preferred design type A more than others for Set 5.

After reading the descriptions of the two design types, the 12 month resident showed an even split between design type A and a mixture of the two types. Those living less than 12 months out of the year at Sea Pines preferred design type A.

Therefore, the residents at Sea Pines do prefer design type A overall, however, they do enjoy formal landscaping at entrances and in places where flowers are purposely planted.

Qualitative analysis results

Faced with the choice between the two options, the survey responses show a preference for a well-maintained natural design over more formal options. Residents also voiced that if carefully selected areas for formal development exist within the backdrop of the unique landscape Hilton Head Island cultivates they would find these improvements necessary and meaningful.

Current satisfaction levels with Greenwood Gate (GG) for all survey participants

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Do not have a preference or do not have enough information
Gate design	37.5%	42.8%	13.8%	4.9%	1.1%
Gate maintenance	46.0	45.5	6.5	1.2	0.7
Entrance corridor design	31.3	42.2	18.9	6.2	1.4
Entrance corridor maintenance	38.1	47.7	11.4	1.8	1.1

Current satisfaction levels with Ocean Gate (GG) for all survey participants

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Do not have a preference or do not have enough information
Gate design	27.6%	41.4%	17.1%	4.8%	9.2%
Gate maintenance	33.0	45.8	9.4	2.1	9.7
Entrance corridor design	25.1	39.5	21.4	4.6	9.4
Entrance corridor maintenance	30.3	45.1	13.2	1.6	9.7

Roadside setting treatment comparisons preferences for all survey participants

	Design type A - natural	Design type B - formal	Prefer a mix of two types	Do not have a preference or do not have enough information
Set 1 Entrance treatment	35.6%	23.5%	40.4%	0.5%
Set 2 Road	68.7	14.1	16.8	0.4
Set 3 Interior roadway	65.3	13.9	20.8	0.0
Set 4 Roadside	67.5	14.2	18.1	0.2
Set 5 Plantings and flower beds	36.3	26.1	37.3	0.4

Preference after reviewing the major characteristics of each primary landscape design for all survey participants

	Design type A - natural	Design type B - formal	Prefer a mix of two types	Do not have a preference or do not have enough information
	49.3%	9.6%	41.1%	0.0%

Seasons of residency break down of all survey participants:

	# of participants	% of survey participants
12 months	299	52.4%
Winter	113	19.8
Summer	102	17.9
Fall	164	28.7
Spring	179	31.3

*Survey participants reporting less than 12 months residency may be in more than one season

Differences in times of residency and Preference after reviewing major characteristics of each primary landscape

	12 month	Winter resident	Summer resident	Fall resident	Spring resident
Design type A	48.3%	53.1%	49.0%	54.3%	52.3%
Design type B	10.8	8.8	14.7	9.8	11.0
Prefer a mix	40.9	38.1	36.3	36.0	36.6
Do not have a preference or do not have enough information	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Differences in times of residency and Roadside setting treatment comparison Set 1 Entrance treatment

	12 month	Winter resident	Summer resident	Fall resident	Spring resident
Design type A	34.1%	47.4%	31.1%	41.9%	42.0%
Design type B	23.6	19.3	28.2	24.0	22.4
Prefer a mix	41.6	33.3	39.8	33.5	35.1
Do not have a preference or do not have enough information	0.7	0.0	1.0	0.63	0.6

Differences in times of residency and Roadside setting treatment comparison Set 5 Plantings and flower beds

	12 month	Winter resident	Summer resident	Fall resident	Spring resident
Design type A	37.1%	34.8%	36.3%	37.1%	37.9%
Design type B	25.1	26.1	32.4	24.6	27.0
Prefer a mix	37.5	38.3	31.4	37.7	35.1
Do not have a preference or do not have enough information	0.3	0.9	0.0	0.6	0.0

Qualitative analysis

Natural Design

Positive Impressions

In the survey responses, there is an overwhelming positive attitude to the natural design of the landscape. Respondents specifically comment on the specific looks of overhanging canopies and the natural plants and grasses indigenous to Hilton Head Island. Multiple responses claim that the natural look of the surroundings were important for their choice of residence. For many, the natural look of the landscaping gives Sea Pines its unique identity.

Some responses were specific to Frasier's original ideas for the area, which reflect more than just an appreciation and conservation of nature, but also a conservation of the natural identity inherent in the Sea Pines community.

The conservation of the natural design is perceived to conserve additional resources. The respondents assume (either correctly or incorrectly) that the natural landscaping needs less maintenance, fertilizer, and water, subtly reflecting a conservation ethic inherent in the community, while financial savings are generated by a reduced need for these resources.

"I prefer using native plants. It is more cost effective, better for the environment. Plants that are indigenous to the area should be used. What sets Sea Pines apart from other resorts areas is the natural environment."

Negative impressions

The repeated drawback to the natural design is the presence of pine straw, whether naturally occurring, or distributed, the perception is that, when dried, looks dirty, messy, sloppy, or unkempt – all terms used by various respondents.

This look is especially noticed along the roadways and areas popularly visited via bicycle. If care is given to keeping the natural look tidy, much of these concerns would be alleviated.

“Pinestraw and mulch along roadsides have a drab and unkempt appearance as

This is the only significant set of comments given negatively to the idea of the natural design elements, and largely outweighed by the positive comments on natural beauty, design, and environmental concerns.

Formal Design

Positive Impressions

The elements of the formal design are appreciated in many aspects, respondents suggest the use of colorful annuals, or flowering plants and shrubs, where the natural landscape can sometimes be perceived to be “drab”.

The development of formal landscaping in some specific areas are seen to add an element of class and professional attention to details.

Negative Impressions

Many of the negative comments toward a formal approach to landscaping is the loss of Sea Pines' identity; there is a palpable aversion to looking too much like big city suburban designs and other developments in the Hilton Head and Bluffton area, and the extensive hardscaping is negatively compared to places like Disney, Florida, Sun City, and office parks. Respondents see Sea Pines as being a place to leave the "cookie-cutter" developments of ex-urban areas behind.

"I think that being overly formal does not fit the history, legacy, essence of Sea Pines. We are not Wexford, Long Cove, etc. I resist designs that suit the resort model more than our history."

The ideas of "getting away from it all" are constantly reinforced throughout the survey responses. The residents Sea Pines feel very strongly about the community being a special and unique place to live, and to have people visit. There is a strong sense that improvements could be made, but they are actually only improvements if they don't impact life too fiercely, or change the overall, intangible feelings created by the natural

environs that define Sea Pines for its residents.

While there are some current formal elements already in place, they are, in many cases, perceived to be contrived and under-cared for. This development is seen by some to be wasteful and unsound, both environmentally and financially, as the formal designs may imply an unnecessary investment where costs are seen to need to be minimized.

"The formal look seems to me to have a much better overall appearance. Because of the better look to me of the formal design visitors would take more notice of Sea Pines and feel even better about the plantation. Also, the people who live in Sea Pines would have a better feeling of the area as well because the formal landscape areas would stand out and look better overall. "

"My major concern about the formal design style is the significant added cost for installation and maintenance. I do not believe it is worth the extra expense."

The Happy Medium

When asked to choose between the choices of “natural” and “formal” most respondents fell into a pro-nature camp, but many of these responses were tempered with qualifiers. In both camps there were many responses that acknowledged that there are places for both kinds of development. The opinions in the debate are not significantly divided on a polar scale, but tend to overlap more than they disagree.

“My opinion weighs heavily towards the original vision to be close to nature with a light manicure and native plantings. Having the gates and entry corridors dressed up with festive seasonal plantings is welcoming and appropriate and maybe a few other spots around the resort”

Most commonly, people would like for the visitors to be greeted in a formal setting, with well-maintained plant beds at entrances, and floral displays in some of the more developed settings. The overall impression is that it should be easy to turn a corner and find oneself deep in a setting of natural wilderness – which merges into developed areas with carefully designed formal landscaping providing for visitors who should easily be able to find their way around.

“I prefer the more formal look, but I think that in practice, a combination of the two styles will be less expensive and easier to maintain. The formal look is certainly more colorful and in April, when the azaleas are blooming, Sea Pines is at its best.”