

CI Rally – Recent Public Info - Ltrs

Island rally set for Saturday The St. Marys EarthKeepers are hosting a Rally for Cumberland from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 24, at Howard Gilman Memorial Park in St. Marys. “The response has been amazing and we anticipate a very large turnout,” St. Marys EarthKeepers Chair Alex Kearns said. “We’ve been contacted by people from as far away as Houston who plan to attend and online carpools are being organized by groups throughout Georgia and Florida. The love for the island is deep and people are passionate about preserving the world’s diminishing wilderness.” Along with entertainment courtesy of The Friese Studio of Music, there will be several food trucks and booths hosted by the National Parks Conservation Association, Wild Cumberland, the Dogwood Alliance, the Center for a Sustainable Coast, The Sierra Club, Oceana and others. A variety of speakers will take the stage throughout the event and the first 400 attendees will receive a free “Don’t Develop Cumberland Island” T-shirt. Following the rally, there will be a limited-seating screening of the Mark Albertin short documentary, “The Shrinking Sanctuary: Cumberland Island,” at 5 p.m. at Theatre by the Trax. The rally is being held in response to a Dec. 7, 2016, decision by the county planning commission to grant a hardship variance to Lumar LLC, the owners of an 87- acre parcel of land within Cumberland Island National Seashore. The owner/applicant requested to subdivide the property for their heirs and build a “family compound.” The variance was appealed and the county began considering rezoning of all 1,000 acres of fee simple inholdings on the island, which led to a series of discussions, negotiations and public reactions. Online petitions garnered more than 22,000 signatures while a local petition gained more than 3,000 names. A recent poll revealed that more than 70 percent of Camden County citizens opposed any rezoning that would allow any new development on the Island. As it stands now, the county has agreed to allow the National Park Service time to analyze the situation and strive to arrive at a resolution that is palatable to all stakeholders.

Looking forward to an ordinance for Cumberland Dear Editor, On Tuesday, June 13, in response to a request by the National Park Service, Camden County Commissioners voted to delay a proposed rezoning of private property on Cumberland Island. The park service’s desire to interact with the island’s private property owners is encouraging and significant, but should not be a substitute for ongoing county involvement. A change to the island’s zoning is a necessary step in the long-term protection of the national seashore. Like it or not, the National Park Service is unlikely to use eminent domain to condemn private property on the island. Therefore, the only way to reduce the overall number of future homes is to encourage the voluntary donation of land to the park service or the voluntary donation of conservation easements to an accredited land trust, like The Nature Conservancy. As an incentive for conservation, the federal government provides tax benefits to private landowners who donate property or give up development rights. Zoning is one key factor that informs the Internal Revenue Service’s scrutiny of the value of the relinquished property rights. The county has a very important role to play in defining reasonable development rights through zoning. Without these rights, a landowner has little incentive to take future construction off the table. As drafted, the county’s proposed ordinance may include a density higher than many are comfortable with when thinking about an eventual build-out of the island. However, there are stronger provisions in the ordinance that have been largely overlooked. These include incentives for conservation easements and a prohibition of any future subdivision of

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private property. As such, the draft ordinance could be a strong tool. If passed, it would be one of the most conservatively written zoning ordinances in the nation. Now, with a strong draft ordinance in our back pockets, it is time for the National Park Service, One Hundred Miles and others to work with the landowners to come up with a comprehensive solution whereby land is donated to the park, voluntary easements are placed on private property and the county zoning regulations facilitate continued protection of the park. Like many, we would like to drastically limit the number of potential homes within the Cumberland Island National Seashore. Low-density zoning — even the one unit per 15-acre density proposed by the county — can offer a solution for both those with an interest in donating development rights and those who want to build an additional home or two for their children. The long-term preservation of Cumberland Island requires that all stakeholders — both public and private — are acknowledged and considered. The Camden County Commissioners represent an important constituency in this debate and should be commended for their forward-thinking, conservation-oriented approach. We are grateful for more time to negotiate, but look forward to the eventual passage of an ordinance similar to the draft on the table. Protecting and preserving Cumberland Island requires that landowners have the tools they need to make permanent conservation a viable option. Megan Desrosiers, president and CEO One Hundred Miles.

Commissioners should listen to their constituents Dear Editor, On April 29, 2006, more than 150 years after their family tree began, 94 descendants of the slaves on Cumberland Island, many carrying the Stafford name, gathered for a family reunion, of sorts, at the “chimneys” on Cumberland Island. Former park superintendent Jerre Brumbelow welcomed them saying, “This is your heritage, and it’s something you need to know.” Located on private land, the chimneys were excavated by archaeologists providing historical information to these descendants of slaves, many of whom who had no idea where their ancestors originated from. The chimneys are considered by archaeologists as one of the most preserved slave settlements in all of the United States of America. However, even after archaeologists excavated and stabilized the chimney ruins, upon their return one of the few intact chimneys was made into a makeshift barbecue grill. I am grateful for the efforts private property owners, past and present, made in preserving Cumberland from future development, as most barrier islands have fallen prey to over-development over time. If anyone has had the opportunity to view the Ken Burns’ national parks documentaries being aired on public television, in celebration of the 100th year anniversary of national park history, you will be enlightened with the knowledge that there was a time when only the wealthy were privileged enough to enjoy recreation at national parks for its natural beauty. A major part of preserving land for national parks was to prevent it from being spoiled by developers. Partly because of the philanthropy of wealthy private landowners, national parks were made available to everyone to experience the solitude and unspoiled wilderness. The history of Cumberland Island goes further back than the Gilded era of the Carnegies, Rockefellers and Candler families and others who purchased this land after the end of the Civil War. Recorded history dates as far back as the Spanish missions of the 16th century. Cumberland Island is more than pristine secluded white sand beaches hiding behind towering sand dunes and palm trees. American history is embedded deep within the interior of the island as well. The notion of building modern homes, swimming pools and tennis courts on this island is

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a travesty in the making. Unfortunate as it is, we can also expect more ATVs, pets and nighttime light intrusion as well as fences. With that comes the cutting of centuries old hardwood trees, land clearing, water wells, septic and continued construction adjacent to the Sea Camp area. I was appalled at the decision of the Camden County Planning Commission to grant a variance for paved road access. The federal government entrusted our local government with providing reasonable oversight for the protection of Cumberland Island National Seashore. I am disappointed in the Camden County Commissioners for letting this escalate, and muddying the waters with re-zoning. Their decision is a major step backward for the protection of Cumberland Island. The citizens have spoken, and the Camden County Commissioners need to listen to their constituents. That's why we elected them, to represent us. Gaila Brandon St. Mary

Park service takes lead on island Johna Strickland Rush johna@tribune-georgian.com The debate over Cumberland Island's future isn't over yet — and won't be decided anytime soon now that the National Park Service has asked for time to negotiate a resolution. County commissioners had planned to hear the two appeals of a hardship variance if a resolution couldn't be reached by June 1, then acting National Park Service director Mike Reynolds came to town. Reynolds met with county staff, the two parties appealing the variance and the property owners June 2 and asked the county to delay action and let the park service take the lead in negotiations. With the National Park Service involved, it may take up to a year to finalize any agreements, prompting the request to the county. Commissioners unanimously agreed Tuesday to hold off. "The situation involves a difficult balance between private property concerns and the preservation of the character and purposes for which Cumberland Island National Seashore was established," island superintendent Gary Ingram wrote in a June 9 letter to the county, making a formal request. "The complexity is increased further by the number and diversity of the interests involved. "To try and strike this balance, the park service has committed to work with the landowners, county officials and other stakeholders to investigate several possible options for Cumberland Island, including land exchanges and environmental easements. We believe these actions would help facilitate and define any potential changes to Camden County codes. The process for approving and implementing each of these potential solutions can be complex. ... Please be assured that the NPS will work diligently and as quickly as possible through these processes." County staff presented the commissioners with three options: select a date to hear the appeals, start the process of creating a new zoning district or give the National Park Service time to negotiate. County commissioner Gary Blount said Tuesday that he had "absolutely no intention" of changing the island's zoning. The county planning commission approved a hardship variance in December to split about 88 acres on Cumberland owned by Lumar LLC into 10 lots to build a few houses. The vote sparked widespread discussion about further development on the island. Two parties appealed the decision to the board of commissioners in January. The county has met for months with representatives from Lumar and both appeals to try to negotiate a compromise, including potentially changing the zoning. The island is zoned conservation preservation and a zoning change would have to be approved for houses to be built. The county has prepared a draft zoning ordinance that would create a "Cumberland Island district" if enacted. "Recognizing that there is privately owned property within the national seashore, the CID is intended to

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find balance between protection of natural resources and private property rights,” according to the purpose of the draft ordinance. There are only six allowed uses: single-family dwelling; cemetery; wildlife refuge or nature park; power and water supply service; accessory structures for single-family dwellings limited to storage sheds, pole barns and garages; and passive recreation usage consistent with maintenance of the natural landscape, such as unpaved paths. The draft also lays out special provisions that include no further subdivision of lots, no variances, any setback reduction would require a special use permit and one house per 15 acres with the possibility of waiving 50 percent of the density requirement if 80 percent of the parcel is placed in a conservation easement.

Leaders should represent our interests on dais Dear Editor, Riddle me this: Have Cumberland Island (CI) residents agreed to help try and make Spaceport Camden a reality, in exchange for the chance to build houses on the island for themselves and their heirs? And this despite the fact that the legislation which established our national seashore says “The seashore shall be permanently preserved in its primitive state”? That would explain why our commissioners, who want a spaceport more than anything, would be willing to do the unthinkable to our county and ruin this pristine jewel of the Georgia coast. A recent letter to the editor indicated that CI residents “speak as one.” So it’s possible the reason they may be handed Cumberland Island on a silver platter is that there’s something in it for those doing the handing. A plaintive response in the June 1 edition of the Tribune & Georgian asked: “Do the Camden County commissioners work for the Candler and wealthy developers or the people?” Or for those in high places that want a spaceport here? The go-to “space guy,” who, in my opinion, is being paid an arm and a leg to convince the commissioners to build an insanely expensive spaceport that would fly rockets over a nuclear naval submarine base and a revered national park, asked on Dec. 7, 2015, essentially, “What if residents of Cumberland Island weren’t an issue?” I believe this shocking statement is related to what we’re seeing now with the Coca-Cola Candler/ Carnegie clan. Would you choose for Camden County to pursue a spaceport that’s never going to happen, because of all the interruptions it would cause - bringing the entire sub base to a halt, stopping boat traf- fic around Jekyll, Cumberland Island and St. Simons Island, trapping people in their homes or forcing them to stay away for an extended or even indefinite amounts of time, forcing tourists to cancel their long-awaited plans, etc.? Or would you choose to keep Cumberland Island as it is, drawing in tens of thousands of visitors a year, being an economic blessing to St. Marys and a boon to our entire county, and a magical haven for the world forever? Hmm ... For those who keep bringing up jobs: According to the research, a spaceport here would likely bring very few jobs, and most of those would not be high-paying. We need to stop tiptoeing around the \$25 million — down payment — white elephant in the room. We’re not going to stand idly by for the ruination of Cumberland Island for no good reason. We’re not going to fall for hemming and hawing by our elected officials, saying they have no choice but to allow a handful of people to push them around to get houses that will take down St. Marys’ economy and spoil the island visitors’ experience for the foreseeable future. We pay Messrs. Lannie Brant, Chuck Clark, Jimmy Starline, Gary Blount and Ben Casey to protect the interests of the citizens of Camden County. They made a promise to us, and we expect them to keep it. Terri Keller Kingsland

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It's tough to be a commissioner Dear Editor, If I were a Camden commissioner, I'd be outraged. I'm expected to make a decision I am ill-prepared to make. It can have grave consequences. On the one hand, I might deny some corporations their rights, and on the other, I might forever harm Cumberland Island National Seashore. I'm in this predicament because I didn't do what I should have done. When Lumar LLC asked for a variance that was not legally supportable, I should have expected my planning department to deny it. But for whatever reasons, they approved it. Then citizens brought to my attention that the variance failed to meet any of the five necessary legal requirements, the county attorney could have defended the decade-old county zoning code. More than 100 years of U.S. Supreme Court decisions support our law! What should have been simple isn't, anymore. Now I'm asked to change the law for a thousand, scattered acres of land instead of defending our existing law over a simple variance on one parcel. Some landowners claim a historic attachment to their land, but they are relatively recent purchasers. For instance, the corporation that bought the Lumar tract did so secretly less than 20 years ago. In fact, their ownership is still unknown as they hide behind their limited liability corporation. Can a corporation really have an emotional attachment to land they've never occupied? The property owners are cynically relying on the fact that the perpetually cashstrapped National Park Service will not use its legal condemnation power to acquire the land so that it will remain unchanged and pristine for all future Americans. The leverage they are attempting works against the national seashore. For instance, fire control on Cumberland Island depends on periodic prescribed burning to make wildfires less damaging. But more homes make it much harder for the seashore to manage the entire island where Camden County has no fire station. As commissioner, could my vote result in a major fire? The leverage caused by subdividing into many more lots is also especially unfair to taxpayers who will have to pay exaggerated prices for multiple home lots instead of undeveloped properties. It's been done before on Cumberland Island with local politicians profiting. So a vote to allow subdivisions will cast doubts on my motives, even if I am squeaky clean. But won't new homes on Cumberland increase land value and tax revenue for the county? If I were a commissioner, I'd like that. But the downside is that I might be making a decision that would reduce Camden tourism and harm all the folks whose jobs and businesses depend on it. Many private land owners and Greyfield visitors leave from Brunswick and Fernandina Beach, Fla., never setting foot in another Camden business. What if folks with schoolage children decide to live on Cumberland? Shouldn't the school board have a say-so if they are the ones who will have to transport a child from the island to school? I think I'll just let the lawyers decide this thing. Steve Weinkle Harrietts Bluff

Family continued to help preserve Cumberland Dear Editor, Land on Cumberland Island has been in my family for almost 100 years, most of which I have not been alive for. Being born in 1984, I never knew the island before the National Park Service. The fight to save the beauty that is Cumberland from commercial development was won before my time. My family and many others had already taken a stand to preserve the island for me and future generations of all Americans. Because of these actions, I have been given 33 years of absolute joy on the island. Climbing the tentacle-like branches of the live oak, playing in the tidal pools on the beach and fishing in the creeks are just a few of the joyous memories I have of Cumberland. Many people might assume I have a sense of entitlement toward the

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land because I have done nothing to deserve these experiences and have never known anything else. But I do not feel that way at all. Seeing my children have these same wonderful experiences I had growing up gives me a sense of appreciation. I appreciate what the island has given me for the last 33 years, without asking for anything in return. I have an enormous appreciation for my great-great-grandparents who originally purchased land on the island. My grandparents were instrumental in making the deal with the National Park Service work, and I have appreciation for my parents who continue to work toward preserving this magical place. The island owes me nothing. But I owe the island everything. I owe this in honor of my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who I want to know the island in the same natural state as I have known it. The island has been a home and sanctuary for humans for thousands of years, from the Native Americans, Spanish, English and American war heroes, industrialists and, since 1972, every citizen of the United States of America. It has survived wars, fires, storms, invasive species — ranging from the dandelion brought over by Europeans as medicine to the feral hog that roots up anything in its path — and it will continue to survive. I want to be a proactive part of that symbiotic co-existence so the island will not just survive, but continue to thrive as an oasis for plants, animals and humans alike for thousands of years to come. Rip Warren Atlanta

It's the right to use land responsibly Dear Editor, As a fifth-generation member of a family with roots on Cumberland Island, I spent much of my youth on the island before there was electricity or telephone service. We had iceboxes to keep our food from spoiling and used telegrams to communicate off island. Perhaps because we lived on Cumberland without modern conveniences, my family and I experienced the island in an almost primal way. Our lives were incredibly close to nature. I hope this helps people understand why Cumberland has become sacred ground for us. We have lived here for generations, and we will be buried here alongside our forbearers. Cumberland has made us environmentalists, not developers. I have supported the Southern Environmental Law Center, The Coastal Conservation League in South Carolina and many other conservation organizations. I am the chair of the Longleaf Alliance, which is helping to restore the longleaf pine savannah that once existed throughout the southeastern coastal plain, including Cumberland. I was also on the board of directors of the Low Country Open Land Trust. Our grandfather gave his 2,000-acre North Carolina farm to The Nature Conservancy. Contrary to much of what you have heard or read about us, we believe in conservation. When social media groups disparage us, and second-guess our intentions, they do so without any knowledge of our contributions to preserve Cumberland. I want to leave you with a thought, one that goes well beyond what is at stake for Cumberland. We have been responsible stewards of our land. We have built homes for our own use. We prevented titanium strip mining from destroying thousands of acres of island wilderness. We worked with the National Park Service to build the “parallel trail” on our land so hikers could avoid walking on the main road. We made it possible for the Cumberland Island National Seashore to come into existence. So what are we to think if we are now punished for our efforts? Is this another incidence of “no good deed goes unpunished?” What are other private landowners across America to think when they learn that we did everything right and then found our private property rights threatened? Will they be willing to preserve their land for future generations? For public use? The decisions that are made for Cumberland will affect thousands more private properties. This is not just about one island. We will

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continue our stewardship of the island and use our land in a way that preserves the island's natural beauty. There will be no large-scale development, simply houses for our families. We want the right to use our land in a responsible manner, just like any other residential property owner in Camden County. Barclay McFadden Charleston, S.C.

Share opinions with commission Dear Editor, Nestled off the Georgia coast, Cumberland Island remains one of the state's and nation's greatest natural treasures. Designated as a national seashore under the control of the National Park Service, the natural beauty, biodiversity and inexplicable magic of the island has enchanted and inspired its visitors since 1972. However, the Camden County Board of Commissioners may rezone 1,000 acres of this land to allow for residential development by Lumar LLC, which represents heirs of the Coca-Cola founder and other island landowners. These 1,000 acres of privately owned, fee simple inholdings, which describe landowned completely, without any limitations or conditions, cannot currently be developed for residential purposes. If this rezoning occurs, then Cumberland could be transformed into essentially an exclusive gated subdivision. A Cumberland Island adulterated by houses and septic systems would completely contradict the legislation which established the national seashore. This legislation states verbatim that "the seashore shall be permanently preserved in its primitive state." Thus, how can the Camden County commissioners and Lumar LLC disrespect this imperative? Do the Camden County commissioners work for the Candler and wealthy developers, or the people? As citizens, we must remember that the Cumberland Island National Seashore belongs to us. We cannot let private interest sully the ethereal beauty, wilderness and unique ecological state that define this public land to so many who love it. Thus, as citizens, we must act now to preserve this land for future generations so that they, too, can explore the maritime forests, undeveloped beaches and marshes that define Cumberland Island. To act, please contact the Camden County commissioners at (912) 510-0464 or visit their website at www.co.camden.ga.us/80/ Commissioners for more information regarding commissioner meetings, emails and addresses. Also, follow Save Cumberland Island National Seashore and the Cumberland Island Coalition on Facebook for updates and more information regarding the situation. Diane Klement Evans

Should the park service have to monitor activities? Dear Editor, In the 1880s Camden County still suffered economic hardship from the Civil War and reconstruction period. Pittsburgh industrialist Thomas Carnegie, at his wife Lucy's urging, bought land for her on south and central Cumberland Island from its financially distressed owners. While the middle classes satisfied then current romantic tastes buying paintings of idyllic landscapes, the truly rich of the Gilded Age bought the landscapes themselves and created fanciful, elaborate idylls, retreats for their exclusive pleasure. At the turn of the 20th century, 200 employees maintained Lucy Carnegie's Cumberland buildings, formal gardens, livestock and grounds under the curious gaze and to the amazed puzzlement of Camden locals. In 1930, the beginning of The Great Depression, Charles Howard Candler Sr., a beneficiary of Asa Candler's Coca-Cola fortune, purchased sole ownership of a financially stressed hunting club at the north end of Cumberland that he and his son had joined a few years earlier. Howard added additional acreage by buying land from

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his financially distressed neighbors and turned the whole into a family retreat. For more than 5,000 years, human fortunes have risen and fallen, cultures have flourished and perished on Cumberland, but the Carnegie/Candler period of influence, Cumberland's most frivolous and exotic, threatens to permanently thwart the island's former ability to throw off man's successive onslaughts and reclaim its wild potential. Whatever presence these remaining inholders claim, whether 90 or 135 years, they have spent the last 45 years within the boundaries of our national seashore and, for most of their family members, for only a few holidays a year during the entire period. The 4,000-year cultural heritage of the Inuit of northern Alaska or native tribes of the Great Plains deserve our solicitous deference to their tribal behaviors and special demands, not these tribal Carnegie/ Candler. Along with feral pigs and wild horses, should park employees helplessly monitor a permanent, geometrically increasing number of Carnegie/Candler heirs plopping new homes, septic fields, wells, utilities and vehicles onto undeveloped land for their episodic use? Facts refute mythical claims of their special gene for stewardship. The crises some family members rush to quell are ones others of their clans directly caused. Do we reward the arsonist who puts out the fire he started? The heirs' claim is not credible that they are inflating development density demands to protect themselves from a threat of low valuation resulting from possible condemnation of undeveloped inholder land. They know the history of condemnation cases on Cumberland during the early years of the national seashore. Taxpayers were skunked by lawyers, Grover Henderson and Bobby Lee Cook, who masterfully manipulated the jury's misconceptions and opinions to convince them to award princely sums of scarce public money to buy the contested acres for the American public. With national funding again scarce and local officials appearing confused about the issues, Candler and Carnegies have sprung to action to press their bold and disastrous development challenge: Opportunism disguised as hardship. Genius! Jacqueline Eichhorn Harrietts Bluff

Opposition to island homes continues TRIBUNE-GEORGIAN.COM Tribune & Georgian Volume 114, No. 22 © 2017, Tribune & Georgian, Community Newspapers Inc. OBITUARIES CRIME REPORT OPINION UPCOMING EVENTS INDEX BREAKING NEWS on the Tribune & Georgian website at www.tribune-georgian.com Check For 2A 3A 4A 6A POLL Do you think getting a tech college in Camden should be a top priority for state legislators? Vote online at www.tribune-georgian.com and see last week's results on page 5A. Like the T&G SPORTS PEOPLE CLASSIFIEDS LEGALS 1B 3B 5B 7B Tribune & Georgian file photo A survey and petitions show that many people are opposed to allowing further development on Cumberland Island National Seashore, a question fueled by a hardship variance that was approved in December. More than 3,200 people have signed a local petition asking county commissioners to prohibit the construction of new private residences on Cumberland Island. About 57 percent of those who signed live in Camden County, 700 people live elsewhere in Georgia, 677 people were from another state and 15 were from another country. "We think that it is significant that support and love for Cumberland Island is being expressed not only by the constituents of the county commissioners but also by people throughout the United States and even from other countries — people who come to Camden County to experience Cumberland Island and who spend their money here in our county," said Bill Bruce, who helped collect signatures and filed one of the appeals of the hardship variance on the behalf of dozens of residents. "... The petition's aim is to address specifically that any action, whether possible

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continuation or modification of the existing zoning, which does not permit residential development, or new zoning or other actions such as the granting of zoning variances, does not permit the building of new private residences.” Two online petitions — one started by the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter and another by a Decatur citizen — have garnered more than 11,300 signatures in the last several months. The petitions were triggered by a county planning commission decision in December to approve a hardship variance to split about 88 acres owned by Lumar LLC into 10 lots. Two parties, including Bruce, appealed the decision to the board of commissioners in January. The county has been meeting with representatives from Lumar and both appeals to try to negotiate a compromise, including potentially changing the zoning. Commissioners have delayed hearing the appeal twice and now say they will hear the appeal if a resolution cannot be reached by June 1. The Southern Environmental Law Center, one of the parties in the second appeal, has also recently gauged public opinion about rezoning the island to allow for residential construction. More than 70 percent of the 400 registered voters in Camden who were surveyed said they oppose rezoning. “Beyond simply opposing new residential development, wide majorities feel the rezoning proposal would negatively impact the environment and local economy,” according to a SELC press release. “Camden County residents place a high value on the Cumberland Island National Seashore with 88 percent feeling it is important to the county’s economy and 77 percent indicating it is important to the local quality of life. Those most likely to ‘strongly’ oppose development correlate highly with those who most frequently visit the island. In an average year, 57 percent of county residents personally visit the island at least once.” Center staff have been participating in the discussions about finding a compromise but are concerned that an agreement on an “appropriate density level and setbacks, which is a crucial issue for the island’s future,” may not be reached. “Up until this point, Camden County leaders have played an important role in protecting the Cumberland Island National Seashore from development,” senior attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center Bill Sapp said. “If we want future generations to enjoy this iconic place — one of the last of its kind — the Camden County Commissioners must take a stand against subjecting Cumberland Island to an inappropriate rezoning proposal.”

We hope to build a few homes for our children Dear Editor, I am grateful that there is so much concern about the future well-being of Cumberland Island. With that in mind, I’d like to share a story about my family and our passion about the island’s unique place in history. In 1959, my great-great grandparents’ home, known as Dungeness, which was built in the 1880s, was destroyed by a fire. I was 1 year old at that time. In the mid-1960s, Greyfield, built at the turn of the 20th century for my great-grandparents, was turned into a hunting lodge by their daughter, my grandmother, Lucy Ferguson. Over time, Greyfield changed from a hunting lodge into an inn. A few years before my grandmother’s passing in 1989, she created a Georgia limited partnership, consisting of her children and grandchildren. Lulie (as we called our grandmother) created this partnership to ensure that we would remain united and not sell off our family legacy. Over the generations, our family has built homes on the island. My ancestors, with far greater financial means, built large structures and support buildings. However, by the time my mother (Lulie’s youngest child) built our home, it was a far more modest structure. We have a family partnership agreement to protect the island by building small homes that are not visible from any

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national park land and have minimal impact to the surrounding environment. We understand that park visitors don't want to see these homes. We want to respect their wishes while also enjoying our privacy. As a result of this agreement, during the 60 years that I have been on this earth, our family has only built six "new" homes on our land on Cumberland. I point out this fact since some people believe that our history doesn't matter. They feel that there are no safeguards going forward unless the county puts a stop to any future homes. It begs the question: How have the private properties on Cumberland been able to remain protected without government intervention? Simply, it is our legacy and our love of the land that has protected Cumberland. When there were threats of development, it was the families that own land on Cumberland that pushed for it being saved by the national park. It is also important to clarify that the land our family owns on Cumberland is not part of the national park. We are fee simple owners and have no agreement to surrender our land upon the end of a given time or generation. We are just friendly neighbors who will hold onto our land and pass it on to our descendants. Our family fought long and hard to protect Cumberland Island so that we can even have this discussion today. I just hope that our desire to build a few homes in the future for our children is understood and respected in the context of our history on the island, and that we are still afforded the rights we have enjoyed for generations. Coleman Carnegie Langshaw Fernandina Beach, Fla.

Much of property is in easement to prohibit building Dear Editor, It is quite understandable that there should be great concern over possible future building on Cumberland Island. Nobody wants to ruin Cumberland Island, especially those of us who were lucky enough to grow up there. As has already been said, the Carnegie descendants, of which I am one, have been excellent caretakers of Cumberland Island, and continue to do so. If anyone really wanted to develop it, it would have already begun long ago. My grandmother stood up before Congress in the early '70s and beseeched them to create a national seashore. We are all fortunate that it now is. My family has put the majority of our properties into 10-year conservation/ wildlife easements that prohibit any new building on much of the land. This results in lower taxes, but we essentially have no services or infrastructure provided, including emergency medical services, police or fire protection. Our family is in the second year of a 10-year easement and covers nearly 80 percent of our family property. Go to www.qpublic.net/ga/camden/ and check it out. Most families have entered into conservation easements on a majority of the properties. That doesn't sound like somebody who wants to change the island's character. It's our family home and all we want to do is keep it as is, and perhaps build another house for a growing family in a location that no one will see as they walk down Grand Avenue. We've been good park neighbors and will continue to do so. Andy McFadden Athens

Allow access for all to spiritual sites on island Dear Editor, Let me initially make it clear that although I emphasize with the land owners and I can fully appreciate why a holy man would want to live in one of the most magical, deeply spiritual places in the world, I do not support residential construction in such a magical, mystical place. Standing among the gnarled twisted stunted live oaks on Cumberland Island is not only beautiful but is a deeply spiritual experience that should be available to all people, not just a

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privileged few. I have never understood how a variance appeal has morphed into a total rezoning of the privately owned tracts on Cumberland Island. What is even more confusing to me is that the ongoing negotiation between land owners, the county attorney and planning department seems to be focused on residential density, not whether or not there should be new construction. I realize the county has limited funds for contentious legal issues especially against people who have essentially unlimited funds but there are some alternatives. The simplest solution is not to even consider rezoning until after the unpaved road variance appeal is decided. If the “hardship” variance is determined not to be valid, one of the potential problem areas (Article 5, Section 510 (b) (3), the 10-lot subdivision, goes away. The other potential problem area is Article 2, Section 221, the conservation preservation district. Land owners have claimed they had no notice of when the conservation preservation code was promulgated as part of the Camden County Unified Development Code in 2008. Their tacit acceptance of the great tax benefit of CP land for the past eight years suggests otherwise. My interpretation of the wording in the conservation preservation code is sufficiently ambiguous that clarification is needed. I suggest adding an amendment to the code clearly stating no residential construction in a CP zone will be allowed on Cumberland Island. Carl Miller St. Marys

Speak up now about developing Cumberland Dear Editor, I am, admittedly, one of those adamantly opposed to more development, building, tree felling, beach traffic, sewage, wells, lights, garbage, and, yes, destruction of an island that deserves to live as one of the few remaining “undisturbed” East Coast barrier islands. With the proposed development, this rare maritime forest will not be regenerated in any living person’s lifetime. It will, in fact, never be. This national treasure will be diminished forever. I am not one who thinks the current parties planning to build on the island are greedy in the sense that they are going to immediately build hundreds of houses to sell for large profits. I truly think the present generation of heirs wants to disturb as few of the ancient oaks and as few of the sand dunes as possible — although enough to build estates for their children and grandchildren on up to 1,000 acres. As much as anything, I know that there is no guarantee what future generations will do with their gifts. Times may get more difficult, money more scarce, island property more valuable. They may not appreciate the island as their forefathers did. Once the door is open for subdivision and development, there are no guarantees. I absolutely understand the appreciation of the island by the current land owners. What an amazing experience growing up on the island, feeding deer from a bottle, watching the turtles nest, mapping huckleberry trees, camping by the stars, helping preserve the settlement and its church, feeling the presence of God. But I can also tell you, as a nature lover, a tree-hugger, a biologist, a birder, and one who appreciates beauty, solitude, and national treasures, that those who intend to build on Cumberland Island do not love that island more than I do nor, for that matter, as the world does. To take away the experience of camping in such a place and experiencing just a smidgen of what the present-day landholders were privileged to experience would be a travesty. How can you truly love this island and yet cut down another huge oak? Or disturb the beaches with more and more vehicles? Or displace hundreds of birds and wildlife species? From what I have read, Sam O. Candler, and the earlier Carnegies, Rockefellers and Fergusons did not want the island to house more families. They wanted the island to be protected and conserved as a national seashore and national park. Sam O. Candler wanted

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homes built no closer to the Atlantic beach than “the mainland” according to “Encounters with the Archdruid” by John McPhee in 1971. He would clearly not approve of the current plans to build homes from shore to shore. This is a critical time — a time to let the trees grow, to let the turtles nest, to let scars from past development heal, to let the island become an East Coast “Yosemite.” Once it’s gone, it is gone. House footprints have already been sprayed in the Cumberland Island soil. We all need to speak up to stop it in its tracks now. Melissa Sellers St. Marys

Citizens, we need you to speak up There are a lot of key decisions facing Camden County officials these days and one thing is for certain — complaining about a decision that has already been made is rarely productive. To influence how public policy is formed and how public funds are spent, citizens need to voice concerns at the planning stages when changes can still easily be made. Unfortunately, that takes awareness and involvement and that may take some time and effort. To have a successful community, we all need to pitch in and do our part to contribute to the common good. To accomplish that, you have to care about what is going on in your back yard. You need to read the newspaper and attend public meetings. You need to ask questions of local governments when their decisions don’t make sense. Most of all, you need to vote for the officials who listen and are responsive to the wishes of their constituents. Citizens can make a difference if they choose to get involved. No one is going to hold our leaders accountable if citizens cannot be bothered to be part of the conversation. We wish to thank our readers for investing their time and money in learning more about Camden County and the issues our community is facing. With that knowledge, we hope they engage with the people and organizations that are working to drive our community forward. A collaborative approach usually produces better outcomes than when just a few individuals are calling all the shots.

Family fought for Cumberland Family fought for Cumberland Dear Editor, With great interest and some surprise I have been reading the social media comments, newspaper articles and op-eds about Cumberland Island. There is quite a machine out there that has spread misinformation and a defiant tone about the extended family of landowners on the island. It incorrectly makes the families out to be greedy land grabbers who only want to make a profit out of our land. As someone who has been a landowner on the island for 56 years, I would like to correct the record. We are the people who fought for Cumberland Island at every turn years before anyone cared. We wanted a park instead of a development. That took time and energy by our parents and grandparents to make that all happen. We also invest time and energy to make the island accessible to everyone. Every spring, summer and fall we support the park volunteers who are working every day to collect important information about the sea life and bird life on the island. While they live at Dungeness, we provide them with access, resources and general care. Many are just young adults who share in our wonder of the island. We have made lifelong friends due to the bond we have called Cumberland. We are the kind of people who donate hours of our time to environmental causes. We make it possible for directors and senior staffers of the National Audubon Society to come to the island during the bird migration in the fall and spring so they better understand the Atlantic Flyway. Other scientists studying many kinds of reptiles have access to our

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property for study. We support any and all folks who are interested in Cumberland for scientific and natural reasons. We regularly pick up garbage on the beach and alert the park service to injured animals and bird life and, yes, help campers in distress. We are the kind of people who walk quietly and avoid areas where park visitors are so that we don't disturb their experience. For many years we have shared our property with park visitors. The best example is our partnership with the National Park Service that allows visitors to walk on private property as part of the parallel trail, which gives hikers a clear and beautiful path instead of walking on the hot dusty road where vehicles pass on one lane. I hope these facts make it clear to the public that we, and our children, care deeply about the island. Please try to be open-minded and put yourself in our shoes because this is the kind of people we are. Nancy Cannon Cumberland Island

No one intends to develop land Dear Editor, As a member of the Ferguson family who owns property on Cumberland Island, I ask you to consider our perspective concerning the request for rezoning. In the media some claim that we are land developers intent only on profit. This is not the case; none of the landowners intend to develop their land or sell any houses or property. The zoning change request is due to a strict zoning designation that was placed on all Cumberland private property without actual notice. Recently, we learned of this designation when one of the landowners sought a building permit and the county required a 10-lot subdivision and a zoning variance in adherence with the new development code. As a group, we seek reasonable use of our property to build a limited number of family homes in the same manner as other property owners on Little Cumberland Island or elsewhere in Camden County. We have no intention of building large numbers of houses and are actively working with the county and National Park Service on a plan that allows us reasonable use of our land while not adversely impacting the park. Our family has lived on Cumberland for over 135 years; Cumberland is our home. From our view, we are fighting to hold onto our family's legacy of love and care for Cumberland, which we have worked hard to preserve. Our family home, Grey-field, was converted to an inn by our grandmother, Lucy Ferguson, in 1966 as a means for her children and grandchildren to keep the land in our family. She tirelessly taught us that keeping the land was far more important than the money it could bring. Growing up on Cumberland we farmed, cut timber, raised cattle, hunted, fished and worked at the inn. We know where the hickories and wild persimmons grow, which live oaks bear the most acorns and which muscadine vines can be counted on to produce. The Island is the place of our first memories; I cannot express my gratitude for the great blessing to have had a close, lifelong relationship with this place and its people. There is an old photograph of our grandmother bottle-feeding a fawn while sitting in the lap of a big live oak just in front of Greyfield. I think she was about 17 years old at the time; she was born in 1899. Fifty years later the same tree had not changed much where, as a boy, I spent many happy hours. Now, one hundred years later, the branches of the old oak hang to the ground under their own weight and now, with a steadying hand, my 2-year-old granddaughter walks those same limbs. It is a comfort to think that when my time is gone that tree will very likely still be there. I hope that my granddaughter will be able to climb that tree with her grandchildren, and I expect that most people would want the same for their families. Jamie Ferguson Cumberland Island Hopefully efforts result in a fair resolution for all Dear Editor, Many of the lifelong private landowners on Cumberland

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Island have taken great care to express to the general public what it is we are asking for, as far as the right to build family homes on the island, so I will not rehash their thoughtful communications. I do, however, want to correct a false premise the opponents to our efforts have propagated throughout the media and through their wide communications to the public. Article after article, social media postings, etc., have described the Cumberland landowners as “developers” seeking to exploit the beauty and magic of Cumberland Island for our own enrichment. Nothing could be further from the truth. No one who owns property on Cumberland wants to see the nightmare scenarios our opponents suggest will come true and our actions over the decades indicate just that. We are not developers seeking to build homes to be marketed to the public and thereby make a profit to put in our own pockets. In truth, we are simply private property owners who wish to maintain the homes we’ve cherished and cared for over the last 130 years and, if necessary, build or replace homes for future needs. We certainly understand the need for thoughtful planning and consideration of the national park and its visitors under any circumstances involving building. Lastly, I know many of the players in this effort are working hard to develop a long-term solution that works for all parties involved. It’s a difficult task for government officials to make the best decision for the island’s future but, hopefully, the parties’ thoughtful and reasoned efforts to date will result in a fair solution for all and cooler heads will prevail. Stillman McFadden Germantown, Tenn.

Clause in public law should be more worrisome Dear Editor, Having followed the recent controversy over the zoning variance requested by the Candler family and the possible rezoning of the remaining “retained rights” acreage by the Camden County commissioners, this reader suggests that a more serious threat to the preservation of Cumberland Island lies within the enabling legislation that established the island as a national seashore back in 1972. In reading through that legislation, whose pertinent sections are available on the National Park Service website, the Secretary of the Interior was given administrative authority to acquire the right-of-way for a “Cumberland Island Parkway,” by buying up to 1,000 acres of land through voluntary purchase from private owners and subsequently build this parkway with whatever causeways, bridges and other related infrastructure is needed for access to the island (See Section 3, Public Law 92-536). While not authorizing the use of eminent domain by the secretary, that could be changed by amendment anytime. With the possible development of the Spaceport, or failing that effort, some other industrial use of the former Thiokol site, you can bet pressure will build for easy access to the northern end of the island. And all it will take is a simple single amendment to Section 3 of PL 92-536 at the federal level to Cumberland’s enabling legislation to grant the power of eminent domain to the Secretary of the Interior for the “Cumberland Parkway” to move forward. As an older “boomer,” fisherman and ocean lover, at various times I have vacationed along the coast from Virginia to the Florida Keys and up the Florida west coast. One sad experience has stayed with me for years: that of being among the last vacationers to ride the small car ferry from Fort Myers over to Sanibel-Captiva islands the year before the present causeway was completed. At the time of my visit with my parents, there was only one modest motel on Sanibel, a few stores and private residences (what we knew then as “old Florida”). That’s gone forever. And, as most would agree, once either a large commercial ferry service is established or a bridge built to a barrier island, the developers soon

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follow and cannot be stopped. In conclusion, then, I encourage those friends of Cumberland Island, including those on either side of the current zoning debate, to unite in seeking an amendment to PL 92-536 which deletes Section 3 in its entirety and puts in its place a permanent ban on construction of any bridges or large scale commercial vehicular ferry docks on Cumberland Island, ever. Vinson Straub St. Marys

LAST WEEK'S RESULTS (Thursday, May 25, 2017)

What do you think the county should do about Cumberland?

- 68% Deny the variance.
- 18% Approve the variance.
- 09% Some combination of these options
- 05% Consider altering the island's zoning.