

Lot division, zone changes could alter Cumberland

Dear Editor,

Imagine for a minute: You are on the ferry to Cumberland Island. This is the big vacation you've been planning for years. A time to escape from it all, traffic, noise, pollution, concrete, people. A time to find peace in a place reminiscent of the past when there were more open, untamed spaces. You've heard about the endless stretches of empty beaches, ancient live oaks, turtles, birds and wild beasts, quiet campgrounds, walking for hours without seeing anyone. You're staying in the wilderness area, which should guarantee the peace and quiet you can't seem to find except in other undeveloped paradises such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. At the Sea Camp dock, you hear bulldozers, chainsaws, and nail guns being used to build houses less than a quarter mile away. You see carcasses of live oak waiting to be carried away. Then you notice a mud slick on the ebbing tide. Looking upstream, you see barges staged for building a dock and two-story dock houses. Then the "No Trespassing" and "Private Property" signs along the walking path heading north. On the hike, you are forced off the road by private residents driving toward the beach. Are you on the wrong island? This could all happen, and worse, if the proposed subdivision and rezoning on 1,000 acres of in-holdings on Cumberland Island is permitted. Depending on rezoning, there could be hotels — not a hotel for most of us, given the expensive proposition of running a hotel on a barrier island. More likely, any additional hotels would cater to the wealthy, charging \$500-plus a night. Cumberland would no longer be the paradise it currently is to folks like you and me. Cumberland will have reversed its course from being a wild and protected paradise, to a playground for the privileged. Having owned estates on Cumberland for generations, the financially and socially prominent Candler family knew better than most the mission of Cumberland Island National Seashore adjacent to their land purchased in 1998. When zoned "preservation/ conservation" in 2008, they didn't object. Virtually all real estate is zoned or otherwise restricted in its use for the benefit of everyone. The buyer must find out what restrictions apply and plan its use within those. Few of us expect the rules to be changed to suit our desires. It is disturbing that those with fortunes continue to expect, and get, special favors from those in power while the rest of us play by the rules. I can imagine how wonderful it was growing up with Cumberland Island as your private getaway, but now it is time to let the American people have that same opportunity — to experience Cumberland as an undeveloped preserve. Please join me in being outraged and vocal in objecting to the subdivision and rezoning of Cumberland Island. This incredible place should continue on its way toward preservation and conservation. There are few places left to show our kids and grandkids how beautiful this country, and our barrier islands, used to be.

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