

**OPINION Thursday, April 13, 2017**

### **It's a reasonable use of our land**

As longtime owners of Greyfield Inn and Greyfield Ltd., we understand that Cumberland Island is a unique place. Greyfield was built for our great-grandmother in 1900 and was a family home until the late 1960s when our grandmother, Lucy Ferguson, and her son, turned the home into an inn. Her vision was to provide a place for younger generations to work while instilling a strong sense of responsibility and appreciation for Cumberland. Under Oliver and his wife Mary's management, the small inn has grown into one with a worldwide reputation. For seven generations now, our families have helped care for and protect the 36,000-acre island. Several years ago, our family sold more than 1,000 acres adjacent to a wilderness area to the Nature Conservancy at a discounted price. A portion of the land is a part of the 9,886-acre wilderness area of the national seashore. In recent years, we and several other property owners have worked with the National Park Service to allow visitors to walk from one end of the island to the other via a remote pathway as part of the Parallel Trail. This trail allows park visitors to hike the length of the island and avoid traffic on the main road. A portion of the trail traverses our private property. It isn't marked, so hikers never realize they are walking on private land. Both of us are part of the group asking the Camden County Commissioners to use our own land to occasionally build a home for our family members. We think this is a reasonable use of our land that does not harm the environment. The other families that own private land on the island feel the same way; any home they build will be for their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. No one in our family is planning to build houses and sell them to others for profit. We realize that some people oppose any new buildings on the island. As a family who has watched our grandmother, parents and children enjoy the island all of our lives, we understand that position. But we also believe that there is a reasonable compromise that can balance the island's environmental needs with those who own private property. To achieve both goals, our proposal to the county commission will include the following requirements: • First, any home built will be very similar in dimensions — size, height and look — to current private homes on the island. Contrary to some reports, there will be no McMansions, subdivisions, gated communities or other large structures that will be eyesores. Any new homes will look like the houses that are there now. • Second, there will be a limit on the number of homes to be built annually. Because these homes are for family members, none of the landowners want or need to build several homes. The Greyfield Board of Directors maintains strict guidelines for new home construction. In addition, the cost and logistics of building a new home on the island makes it expensive and time consuming. Moving construction crews and materials by barge is not easy. Home construction would be done as in the past, without heavy equipment and with minimal disturbance to the actual homesite. Protection to trees would exceed the established county tree ordinance. • Third, there will be no disruption to public beaches, campsites or other parts of the island. There will be a significant buffer zone between any new home and any land that is part of the national seashore. It is our intention to retain our privacy and not disturb the public lands or the visitor experience. We are certain that any private landowner that wanted to build a home for a child or other family member would hope they could use their land for that purpose. That's all we are asking. In addition, the proposed land use law will comply with Georgia's Shore Protection Act and other state and federal laws. We believe our proposal will continue to protect the island while also treating property owners fairly, just as those on Little Cumberland Island and the mainland.

Note: Walter Langshaw is the chairman of the board of Greyfield as its general partner and Oliver Ferguson is the operating manager of Greyfield Inn.