

# Public Summary of Meeting/Event Minutes

## January 2024

*Meetings were attended by some or all of the following (alphabetical order):*  
Dr. Kristin Brzeski (Michigan Technological University), Susan Califa (resident),  
John DeFillipo (Texas Conservation Alliance), Cary Fico (resident), Josh  
Henderson (Galveston Island Humane Society), Jo Hewett (resident), Karla Klay  
(Artist Boat), Bob Stokes (Galveston Bay Foundation), Suzanne Stone  
(International Wildlife Coexistence Network), Dr. Bridgett vonHoldt (Princeton  
University)

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*This document was last modified on 22 January 2024.*

## **Mission**

The goals and outcomes we wish to see achieved for Galveston Island's East Beach development and for all future developments moving forward are outlined here:

- To establish an ongoing working relationship with better communication between developers with the community;
- Provide suggestions for developers as they create long-term plans (a.k.a. wildlife protection plan, avian protection plan, etc) for coexistence that include but are not limited to wildlife corridors, buffer or setback zones, green spaces with native vegetation and landscaping to provide cover and habitat;
- Request that all documents (environmental study, wetland delineation study, wildlife study, impact study, infrastructure plans, etc.) by developers be made public for the community to know ahead of construction what is planned;
- Request that the developer make available examples of their previous projects that included habitat or wildlife protections/accommodations;
- Galveston City to be innovative and show the nation their leadership in considering and advocating for habitat/biodiversity preservation; and
- Increase public education and awareness, public sentiment, and ultimately build more local advocacy.

## **Galveston County resident reminders**

- City Council elections are May 4th for Mayor and six (out of nine) District City Council members. We encourage you to study their voting records and see where they stand on wildlife/habitat protection and conservation issues.
- Ask candidates their position on updating city regulations to incorporate proposals in the 2011 Comprehensive Plan to require developers to complete environmental/wetland studies, protect wetlands with 50-ft buffers, and include design plans for wildlife corridors, buffer zones, protection plans, and plans for infrastructure to mitigate drainage, pollution (light, noise, physical), and vehicle/pedestrian traffic.
- Watch City Council agenda topics (available online auto-notice in advance of meetings). Be proactive on a topic for which you share a concern. Gather neighbors and attend meetings together to show the topic is a community concern.
- Field candidates who share your values to put pressure on those who do not. Unite with neighbors and friends to be heard.
- Hold developers accountable with public opinion. Use social media to spread the word! Support candidates who promote environmentally sensitive, responsible growth for Galveston City!

## **Minutes from the meeting with RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels**

**Date:** January 9, 2023

### **In Attendance (Ghost Wolf Team):**

Dr. Bridgett vonHoldt, Princeton University  
Dr. Kristin Brzeski, Michigan Tech University  
Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Fndn  
John DeFillipo, Texas Conservation Alliance  
Josh Henderson, Galveston Humane Society  
Suzanne Stone, Int'l Wildlife Coexistence Network  
Jo Hewitt & Cary Fico, East Beach residents

### **In Attendance (Developers):**

Carl Schwab (President, Development, RREAF Holdings)  
Ted Ent (President/CEO, Innisfree Hotels)  
Jeffrey Cart (Environmental Consultant with Altimira; representing RREAF Holdings)  
Gus Knebel (lawyer, RREAF Holdings), [gknebel@millsshirley.com](mailto:gknebel@millsshirley.com)  
Caroline McElroy (General Council of RREAF Holdings)

### **In Attendance (Galveston City):**

Tim Tietjens (City Planner for Galveston)

## **INTRODUCTIONS FROM THE DEVELOPERS**

“This meeting is to help us get to know who we are,” quote by Knebel. RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels are 50%-50% partners in this development. Innisfree is explicitly a developer of beachfront property and brings resort hospitality experience in ownership and operational management. They have lots of other assets in Florida and are a legacy company. Innisfree Hotels stated that they give money back to various communities and are dedicated to education, breaking the cycle of poverty and food insecurity, and providing opportunities for the less fortunate or disadvantaged. Innisfree will stay on site to manage the Hotel. Ent is a Houston native and is “excited about being a good neighbor”. They are spending money to build within the restrictions and will develop something that complements the real attraction which is the beach. Cart stated he has 14 years experience in environmental science, wetlands studies, and permitting. He assured us that they are following the guidelines. They want to have as little impact on wetlands in the area as possible and Cart has been helping them navigate. RREAF stated that their Florida sites followed state requirements for wildlife protection plans, Ent added that Florida developments are focused on dune preservation and protection. RREAF also stated that this (the East Beach development) is the largest privately developed economic plan in

Galveston's history. "[They, RREAF/Innisfree] want to be good citizens of Galveston" and want to bring a product that will be the best single family residential development on the Texas coast.

### **IMPACT ON WILDLIFE AND HABITAT**

The meeting turned to vonHoldt and Brzeski presenting coyote collar data and movement. Cart stated that they had conducted a bird assessment, being aware of the need to protect native and migratory birds. They have developed an avian protection plan and are preparing to do a biological assessment for the eastern black rail. Schwab stated that the north 40 acres will be developed and they employed a local expert (A&M Eddie Rouss) to conduct a wetland delineation, which has since been accepted by the Army Corp of Engineers (ACE). RREAF does not intend to touch the wetlands nor do they want to reclaim them. There are some wetlands and RREAF stated they will use environmentally sensitive structures (e.g. boardwalks). They want to incorporate wetlands into development with a degree of sensitivity. They want to leave that as natural green space. We expressed a desire to avoid building on two ponds, and asked how drainage and runoff will impact wetland ponds, as well as plans for mitigating flooding (such as elevation/grading changes; with the Texas commission of environmental quality). Schwab stated that they know the issue which is "thou cannot concentrate/move upon neighbor". RREAF stated that they know they are in a floodplain. They stated that they will have to move stormwater north (away from dunes) to the channel to run east towards the flood control channel. Schwab stated that they want to be good stewards.

RREAF stated that they will use signage on the beach and on-site training for any managers/staff of the Hotel. We asked for a coyote plan and Cart did not think RREAF would be opposed and stated that RREAF would want to educate. We suggested a vision that included bio/ecotourism for this opportunity where guests may easily see wildlife.

We asked when RREAF will share the documents discussed. Schwab stated that most of that documentation is confidential but with an internal discussion, they will ask if they are willing to make an exception.

### **REQUESTS FOR INCLUSION OF A CORRIDOR**

We asked for a 150 ft-wide corridor. RREAF asked if Islander East would split that difference but Islander East does not have property left to consider this offer. RREAF is only developing half of what they own and they used this to state that they are developing less proportion of their land than Islander East did. We asked about infrastructure (roads, drainage, pollution, etc) and Knebel said that Innisfree is working to City code. Schwab asked about the corridor placement and direction. We stated that the corridor would run from inland to the beach. Schwab scoffed at the fact that coyotes are on the beaches here all the time. He clearly does not know the culture of coyote sightings on Galveston Island. We suggested having documents for visitors on how to avoid negative wildlife interactions. Schwab said that a 150ft corridor is expensive but

“everything is for sale”. He also mentioned the Texas laws that private landowners have are important and that “they” (RREAF) are good listeners but there are limits”. Schwab also stated that RREAF has a “fiduciary responsibility to their investors and to the environment as well”.

### **LACK OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY**

Despite the PUD variance being withdrawn from the City Council meeting, the issues still exist that the community has concerns about the lack of communication and transparency of the developers. The developers have not shared anything with the community for sake of transparency. Knebel stated “You have my contact, and this meeting is to help us know who we are”. Knebel stated that all questions or inquiries can go to him and Innisfree will eventually have a permanent manager with community involvement. The limited communication, RREAF stated, was due to franchise agreements that are “in process which dictates when information is shared”.

We sent a “thank you” email to RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels. We have not received any communication or documents from them since our meeting on 9th January 2024.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

We are appreciative of the developers taking time to meet with us. We all share the goal of healthy economic development while preserving the natural beauty (and uniqueness) of our wonderful city.

### **ACTION ITEMS FOR FOLLOW UP**

- Will RREAF Holdings share their avian protection plan, wetland delineation study results, and any other documentation they have or have submitted to the Army Corp of Engineers?
- What is RREAF/Innisfree’s training plan for the on-site manager and hotel educational packet for tourists?
- What signage will they develop and use on the property?

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

We can provide a template letter for any community member to modify, sign, and share with RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels.

## **Minutes from the meeting with Mayor Dr. Craig Brown**

**Date:** January 10, 2023

### **In Attendance (Ghost Wolf Team):**

Dr. Bridgett vonHoldt, Princeton University  
Dr. Kristin Brzeski, Michigan Tech University  
Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Fndn  
John DeFillipo, Texas Conservation Alliance  
Josh Henderson, Galveston Humane Society  
Suzanne Stone, Int'l Wildlife Coexistence Network  
Jo Hewitt & Susan Califa, East Beach residents

### **OVERVIEW OF “GHOST WOLF” RESEARCH**

vonHoldt and Brzeski reviewed that the coyotes on Galveston Island carry (extinct) red wolf DNA, making these animals genetically unique and scientifically important. To help these animals survive, we must focus on preserving their habitat and their ability to exist. vonHoldt has been moved by how Galvestonians are culturally connected to these animals, evidenced by their Facebook posts and recently the >400 people attending the Town Hall.

### **SUMMARY OF GROUP’S MEETING WITH DEVELOPERS**

We summarized that the tone in our meeting with the developers was generally welcoming and mutually respectful. We presented research results and recommendations for two wildlife corridors (located on the south and north sides of East Beach Dr). Their response was that “they are listening”. We are cautiously optimistic for a positive response, despite their comment that “Everything is for sale”. We requested current wetland delineation studies and environmental studies. They provided some information but claimed confidentiality in releasing actual reports.

### **MAYOR’S COMMENTS AND ACTION ITEMS**

Mayor Brown suspects development will be short-term rental condos and hopes the developers will respond positively to our requests for wildlife corridors. Mayor stated that “This could be such a win for the developers as well as the City – as a result of parties coming together; it could also serve as a pilot program for future development”. He recommended several local foundations that may be open to involvement for finding a way forward with land acquisition, corridor development, wildlife protection plans, education, ecotourism, and more.

\* **Action:** Mayor said he will pursue the topic of wildlife corridors and green space (as well as Wildlife Protection Plan concept) for future development by discussing it with the City Council, Planning Commission, etc, and move to get the topic on upcoming agendas.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

We want to thank the Mayor for his time and sincerity in his desire to help us make a difference on these issues. We all share the goal of healthy economic development while preserving the natural beauty (and uniqueness) of our wonderful city.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

We can provide a template letter for any community member to modify, sign, and share with Mayor Dr. Brown and the rest of the City Council.

## **Galveston Town Hall**

We used the Moody Gardens 3D Auditorium to present an update on Galveston Island ghost wolf research followed up with a panel discussion regarding the development. The auditorium has a capacity of 400 people and it was packed. We also have seen that the online streaming received 617 views to date. Gus Knebel (lawyer, RREAF Holdings, [gknebel@millsshirley.com](mailto:gknebel@millsshirley.com)) and Jeffrey Cart (Environmental Consultant with Altimira; representing RREAF Holdings) also attended the town hall in person.

## Template letter to send to RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels

Date: xxxx

Subject: Desire to see the developer include wildlife corridors, wildlife protection plans and green space

Dear RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels,

I trust this message finds you well. I am writing to bring to your attention an important ecological consideration that I believe, as a concerned community member, warrants thoughtful consideration in your development project on East Beach – the incorporation of wildlife corridors.

As you embark on this development endeavor, it is crucial and imperative to recognize the impact the development will have on the surrounding natural environment and ecological function as a coastal flood plain, surrounding wetlands, and natural green space for wildlife. Wildlife corridors filled with native plants and habitat cover would play a pivotal role in mitigating the potential disruptions to local ecosystems and promoting biodiversity. In addition to a corridor, we recommend wildlife protection plans alongside the avian protection plan. After all, we are experiencing a global biodiversity crisis. Please do your part to uphold your commitment and fiduciary responsibility to the environment, as well as your investors, who will be well served by a welcoming community whose concerns have been addressed to preserve the natural beauty, wildlife, and its habitat that will continue to attract visitors to Galveston. Also, increasingly, consumers are aware of businesses' environmental track record and make purchasing choices accordingly. I also request that you use signage next to these corridors to display proud and positive messaging stating your collaborative team's (RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels) commitment to such (e.g., "Innisfree/RREAF—Partnering with the community to preserve habitat"). It is good business for a venture to start off on a positive note with its community.

I want to encourage RREAF Holdings and Innisfree Hotels to incorporate a plan for donating land that will be wildlife corridors 150 ft-wide to connect the fragmented landscape that will result from the development plans and add 50 ft buffer or setback zones around the wetlands. Such a buffer zone would follow the guidelines of the Galveston 2011 Comprehensive Plan.

Here are a few key reasons for including wildlife corridors in your development design:

- *Biodiversity Conservation*: A wildlife corridor acts as a link between different habitats, facilitating the movement of various species. By providing a safe passage and additional wildlife protections, it contributes to the conservation of biodiversity and helps sustain local ecosystems.

- *Mitigation of Fragmentation*: Development projects often lead to habitat fragmentation, isolating populations and hindering natural movement patterns. A well-designed wildlife corridor mitigates this fragmentation, promoting genetic diversity and long-term ecological resilience.
- *Environmental Stewardship*: The inclusion of wildlife corridors and wildlife protection plans demonstrates our commitment to environmental stewardship. It aligns with sustainable development practices and reflects a responsible approach to balancing human needs with the preservation of natural landscapes.
- *Positive Community Image*: Projects that prioritize ecological considerations, such as wildlife corridors, tend to garner positive community support. Demonstrating a commitment to environmental responsibility enhances the project's image and fosters goodwill among stakeholders.

I understand that project plans may be well-advanced, and incorporating wildlife corridors might require adjustments. However, I firmly believe that the long-term benefits to both the environment and the community make it a worthwhile consideration. Please consider donating the space for wildlife corridors and buffer or setback zones, with plans to fill them with native plants and plenty of habitat cover. Your expertise and leadership role is invaluable in ensuring that this ecological aspect is addressed in a manner that aligns with our community's goals of sustainable and responsible development.

Best regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Position]

[Your Contact Information]

## Template letter to send to Mayor Dr. Brown

Date: xxxx

Subject: Urgent call to see Galveston City require future developers to include wildlife protection plans and design that values the natural landscape

Dear Mayor Dr. Brown,

I trust this letter finds you well. I am writing as a concerned resident and advocate for environmental conservation within our community. Over the years, our city has witnessed substantial growth and development, and while progress is essential, it is equally vital that we prioritize the preservation and protection of our natural habitats and biodiversity. I am aware of the numerous challenges faced by our city in managing development while maintaining a healthy environment for both residents and wildlife. To address these concerns, I am urging the city to adopt a comprehensive approach that requires a design (e.g., inclusion of wildlife corridors and green space) which integrates habitat preservation and protection plans for all future development projects.

Key considerations for incorporating habitat preservation and protection plans:

- *Biodiversity Conservation:* Emphasizing habitat preservation ensures the conservation of local biodiversity, allowing various species to thrive within our city limits.
- *Sustainable Urban Development:* By incorporating habitat, avian, and wildlife protection plans, we can achieve a harmonious balance between urban development and the preservation of natural landscapes, contributing to the long-term sustainability of our city.
- *Community Well-Being:* Access to green spaces and preserved habitats positively impacts the physical and mental well-being of our residents. Integrating these plans enhances the overall quality of life in our city. In fact, I would like to see Galveston embrace the innovative aspects of bio/ecotourism. With a community that clearly displays these values, we will attract high-quality visitors who want to experience a natural coastal habitat and a gem of the Texas coast line.
- *Responsibility and Leadership:* As a forward-thinking city, we have an opportunity to set an example for others by taking a leadership role in responsible and sustainable urban development practices.

I understand that development decisions are complex and multifaceted, but I firmly believe that prioritizing habitat preservation and protection is a crucial step toward creating a resilient and environmentally conscious city.

I respectfully request that you champion this cause within the City administration and work towards implementing policies that ensure all future development projects include robust habitat

preservation and protection plans.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to the well-being of our city and its natural resources. I am eager for Galveston City to engage in further discussions on this matter and contribute to the development of policies that benefit our community and the environment.

Best regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Position]

[Your Contact Information]