

Chapter 9: Economy

9.1 Introduction

As mentioned elsewhere in this plan, the Town exists for visitors and residents to enjoy its many natural resources, and it continues to draw a large number of seasonal tourists every year. Tourism, obviously, is the major economic engine that drives and sustains Edisto Beach.

9.2 Industries

As in many of South Carolina's coastal communities, visitors to Edisto Beach create a substantial economic base. Its reputation as a family-friendly, residential style community make it popular regionally and beyond. Vacation rentals obviously are a large percentage of the tourism based income, with plenty of home and condominium options. However, it should be recognized that businesses centered around tourism, such as shops and restaurants benefit from tourism and also serve as an economic driver.

Developers have also taken note of Edisto Beach's attractiveness to tourists, and as a result a PUD has been established in the Town. While there is obvious economic benefit and potential in this development, the Town should make sure that all development conforms to its residential style and offers family-friendly amenities (walkability, bicycle paths, etc.). Furthermore, development should protect the many natural resources that make Edisto Beach unique and inviting for visitors and residents alike. The natural resources enjoyed by the Town are in and of themselves an economic development engine.

At this time, employment on Edisto Beach is also centered mostly around tourism. This does provide flexibility to those looking for work; however, these jobs usually offer lower wages and are primarily seasonal. Employees working in these seasonal, tourism based positions do not make wages high enough to live permanently on Edisto Beach.

9.3 New Opportunities

While tourism will always be the driving economic force behind Edisto Beach, other businesses may contribute to the economy in other ways. Specifically, home-based businesses—centered around consulting and other intellectual occupations such as e-publishing and investment services—could significantly contribute to the year-round success of the Town. These businesses, through a modified zoning ordinance that encourages but regulates home-based businesses, will be compatible with residential uses; they will not create traffic congestion or any “unsightly” commercial visibility. Many of these individuals would already be well-established, and would probably leave the Town to meet with their clients; the proximity to Charleston International Airport makes this possible. The Town should explore promoting these home-based businesses, which would be an asset to the Town without becoming destinations themselves. Furthermore, these types of businesses will provide a different type of residential market for Edisto Beach. Professionals who have successfully reached a point in their careers and can choose to live anywhere will have chosen Edisto Beach because of the ability to operate out of their home at a place as unique as Edisto.

Goals

- Maintain Edisto Beach’s economic viability through continued tourism-based businesses and new economic opportunities.
- Protect natural resources in recognition that they are part of Edisto Beach’s charm to visitors.

Recommendations

- Encourage updating zoning ordinance that promotes low-impact, low-visibility consulting type home-based businesses that can co-exist in residential areas.

- Continue to promote tourism through marketing campaigns that express Edisto Beach's family friendly style, residential feel and natural resources. Also, promote the entire island, the state park, Botany Bay, the serpentarium, golf course and other surrounding amenities.
- Require developers to protect natural resources and maintain the Town's standards by either requiring the construction of amenities, requiring impact fees or a combination of both.
- Protect Edisto Beach's natural resources by following storm water management best practices and other best practices associated with natural resource management.