City of Isle of Palms South Carolina

Brand Strategy

MILESTONE 2

NOVEMBER 2026



PREPARED BY

BLUE RIDGE CREATIVE MARKETING

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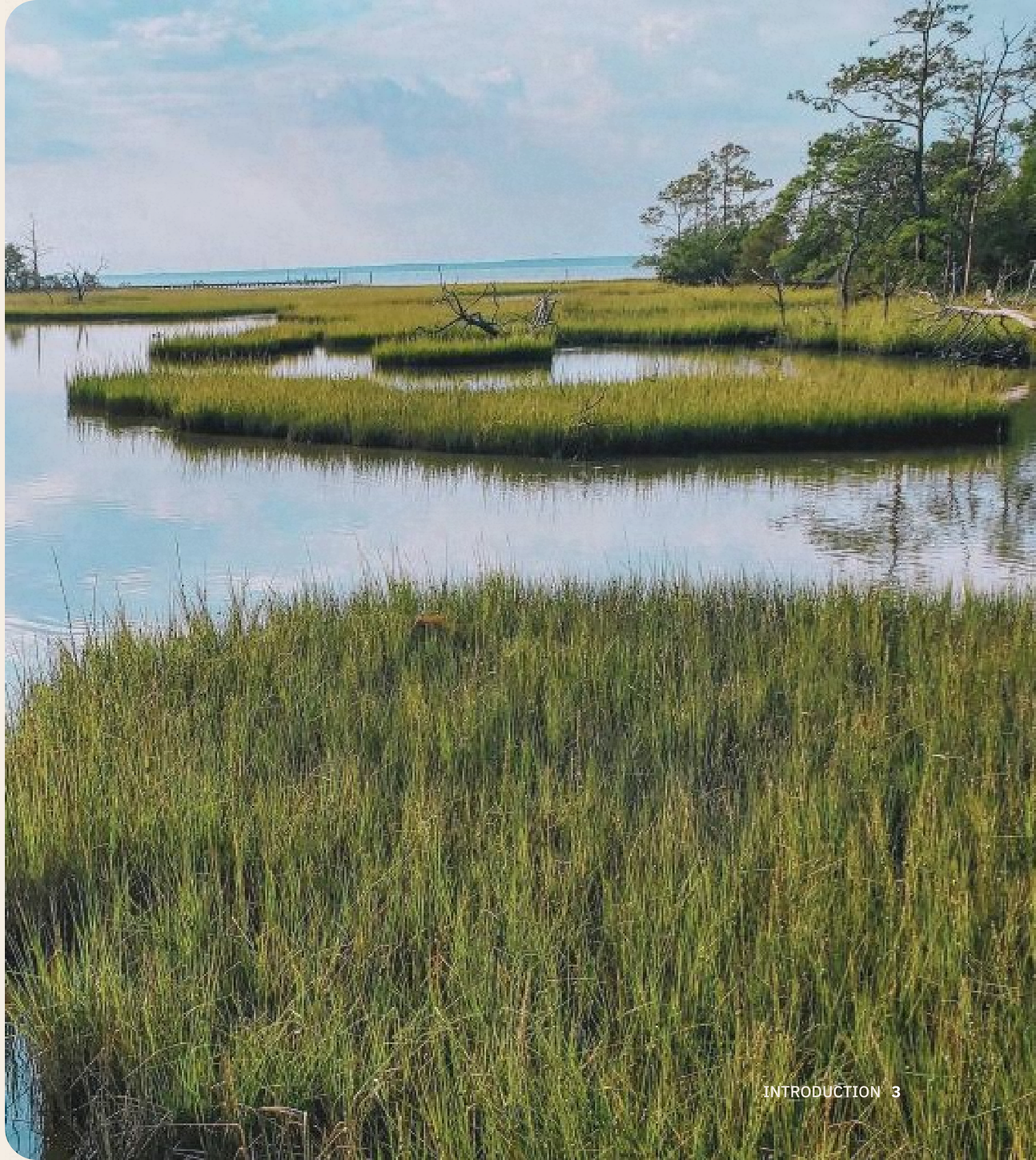
Introduction

In 1670, a weary group of English settlers arrived to the bay near the Isle of Palms. Receiving them were its locals: the Sewee tribe, who famously swam out to escort their new neighbors ashore.

While this moment marked the beginning of the small island's rich history, it also set a precedent that transcended its development: *The welcoming nature of its people.*

Cross the Connector and your shoulders drop, the marsh opens beneath you, and you can't help but feel like you're coming home to your little sandbar. It's a place that carries itself at a casual pace – confident and beautiful, by nature.

All those years since the English were welcomed, Isle of Palms remains home to generations of neighbors, so proud of their island, they simply couldn't stay away.



FINDINGS TO STRATEGY

The research said it.

Six findings were approved in Milestone 1, each forcing a specific decision in this document – the platform, the audiences, the pillars and the system are the results of those findings.

> *Full evidence in the Executive Summary of Findings and its 5 supporting reports (October 2026).*

#1 ONE ISLAND TOLD FIVE WAYS

The City, Chamber, Explore Charleston, Wild Dunes & County Parks agree on the basics, but with no shared standards, each says it differently.

The island needs one story.

#2 FAMILY IS THE THROUGHLINE

“Family” & “home” were the words survey respondents used most.

Family connects the people who live here with the people who return year after year.

#3 TOURISM & RESIDENCY SHARE ONE REVENUE BASE

About ⅓ of City revenue is visitor-linked and 38% of island dwellings hold short-term rental licenses.

The brand can’t pick one over the other. It has to work for both.

#4 VALUE IS GROWING FASTER THAN VOLUME

The Charleston region is earning more per visitor without needing more visitors.

Summers are full – its room to grow is in fall and winter.

#5 FOUND FOR THE BEACH, NOT THE STAY

People search for staying on the island about as often as for the beach, but Google mostly shows them the City’s beach conditions page.

City channels aren’t yet part of the decision to stay.

#6 CONSISTENCY TAKES GOVERNANCE, NOT JUST DESIGN

Staff make branded materials often, but it’s rarely anyone’s core job and there’s no single place to find the right files.

A new look without an owner and a shared library will fragment again.

Brand Strategy

POSITION RECAP

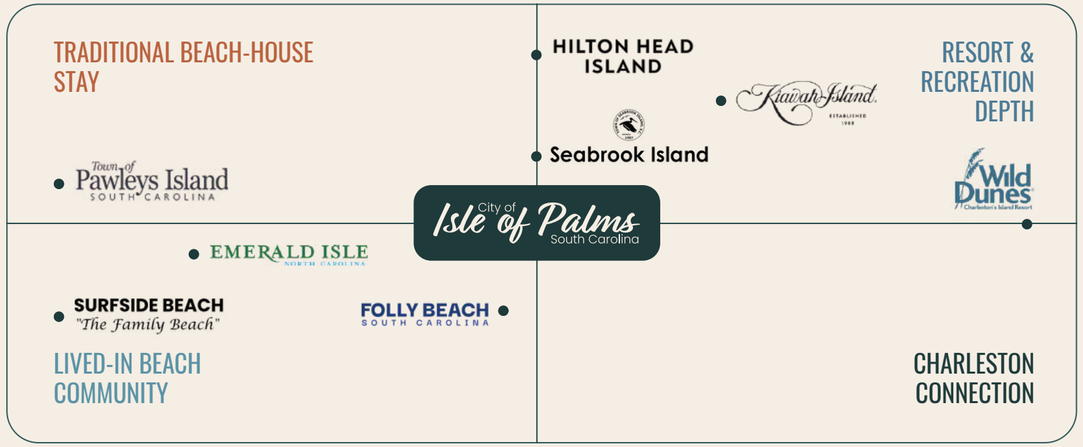
Where we fit – by nature.

Eight destinations compete for the stay IoP *wants*, but none of them can claim all four of the things the island *already has*.

> *Full evidence in the Executive Summary of Findings and its 5 supporting reports (October 2026).*

HOW THIS SET WAS CHOSEN

Competitors were selected from search demand, owned channel analytics and visibility. Four are regional (Folly, Kiawah, Seabrook, Wild Dunes) and four are audience-adjacent drive-market family beaches (Hilton Head, Pawleys, Emerald Isle, Surfside). Hilton Head is the one searchers weigh against IoP most directly.



POSITIONING DIRECTIVE

The position is an overlap rather than a a lane. And it’s the one thing none of these destinations can duplicate.

OUR PLATFORM

Home, before destination.



MARKET CATEGORY

The lived-in beach community.

AUDIENCE

The families that stay – residents building lives and visitors building memories. They're aligned with IoP's easy pace, where there's space to slow down and connect.

VALUE PROPOSITION

A genuine, lived-in island community, surrounded by pristine salt marsh — it's the traditional beach-house stay, the relaxed pace, and Charleston just across the water.

DESTINATION IDENTITY

Isle of Palms is a place shaped by its people, pristine salt marsh, and casual pace. Lived-in, not curated. Beautiful by nature.

CHARACTER EVIDENCE

Defined by its own community as ***welcoming, relaxed, peaceful, natural*** — these are the qualities that keep families coming back, year after year.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

A resort, party beach, commercialized coast, or gated community.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

Isle of Palms is a lived-in place of its people — by nature. Before it's a destination, it's a community of neighbors preserving their little sandbar, returning to their home beach, and continuing an easy way of life, generation by generation. With Charleston mere minutes away, cross the Connector and the pace drops, the salt marsh opens, and the island welcomes you home.

The island of neighbors.

MISSION

To preserve the character, the environment, and the way of life of our island home – welcoming all who come to connect.

VISION

To be the island of neighbors — whose residents are proud stewards, where visitors find connection, and traditions endure for generations to come.

BRAND PILLARS

The pillars that support a sustainable foundation

HOME

The lived-in island — a community of members connected by pride and an infallible sense of place.

“Here, you’re not a guest – but a neighbor for the week."

ENVIRONMENT & STEWARDSHIP

Care over the environmental cycles of this barrier island and its delicate salt marsh systems is tantamount to its future – for residents and visitors, alike.

"We protect the island so it stays itself."

HERITAGE

Traditions of beach stays and warm hospitality, welcoming you back to the beach where you have somehow always belonged.

"Only eight miles from Charleston, yet the Isle of Palms has a whole story of its own."

THE CONNECTOR

A threshold where the island's whole proposition becomes physical — you cross it and feel like you *belong*.

"The threshold where the island becomes yours."

FAMILY CONTINUITY

While family continuity is about families *returning* to the beach — it's also about a community investing in *handing the island down*.

"The beach your family returns to, year after year."

The people of IoP — and the Connector that carries them home.

TO THE RESIDENTS

for whom the Isle of Palms is truly home, the Connector is their *doorstep* — the threshold to the place where they feel safe, relaxed, and proud of where they belong.

TO THE FAMILIES

for whom the Isle of Palms is a tradition, the Connector is *nostalgia* — a passage to familiarity, to memories made, and to memories yet to be.

TO THE QUIET-SEASON GATHERERS

to whom the Isle of Palms is their reprieve, the Connector is their *exhale* — the cross-over from the daily grind to island time, where the permission to slow down is simply part of life.

TO THE DAY-TRIPPERS

to whom the Isle of Palms is their beach day, the Connector is their *celebration* — the easy choice to leave Charleston's bustle behind for a day of sun and sand.

#1

Residents

FOR WHOM THE CONNECTOR IS THEIR DOORSTEP.

Full-time and part-time residents, property owners, and local business owners whose daily lives, traditions, and livelihoods contribute to the island’s identity.







WHAT THEY VALUE	Community character, safety, natural beauty, quality of life, and a healthy local business environment.
PAIN POINTS	Traffic, disruptive visitation, peak season pressures, and concerns that unaligned tourism growth could compromise community character or everyday quality of life.
EXISTING OPTIONS	Participation in City Council, community organizations, public meetings, and other opportunities to influence decisions affecting island life.
THE IOP DIFFERENCE	As an integral part of the IoP experience, the residents are the constant for this location. They’re here with and without the seasonal visitors. Their experiences, stories, and preferences are a piece of the updated brand and they are actively invested in its progress.
CORE BENEFITS	The core community, represented by a brand that promotes responsible visitation, supports resident satisfaction, and promotes local businesses.
EMOTIONAL BENEFIT	Confidence that the island they love is being represented accurately and that their priorities are heard and incorporated – for an IOP that can be enjoyed today, and by future generations to come.

#2

Families

FOR WHOM THE CONNECTOR IS NOSTALGIA.

Parents and multigenerational families who return to IoP for their annual beach stay, often continuing traditions that began in their own childhoods.







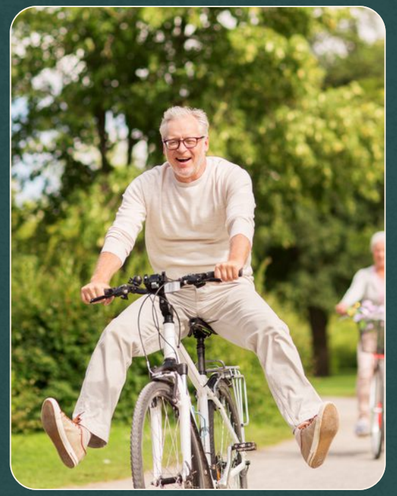
WHAT THEY VALUE	Familiarity, family traditions, shared memories/nostalgia, relaxed pace, and the opportunity to reconnect across generations.
PAIN POINTS	Increasing costs, traffic that limits accessibility, availability of preferred accommodations, complicated group planning, and changes that threaten the familiar island experience. They want to be able to integrate into the IoP community and stay on the island but don't want to sacrifice convenience of city access.
EXISTING OPTIONS	Hilton Head and other established family beach destinations offer broad accommodation options, recreation, and organized activities all within the island.
THE IOP DIFFERENCE	A genuine, lived-in beach community where traditional beach-house stays, local character, and proximity to Charleston create an experience families want to return to.
CORE BENEFITS	A familiar setting for multigenerational stays, a relaxed pace, access to Charleston, and opportunities for meaningful family time.
EMOTIONAL BENEFIT	The comfort of coming back to a place that feels like home, where each generation creates memories alongside the ones that came before.

#3

Quiet-Season Gatherers

FOR WHOM THE CONNECTOR IS THEIR EXHALE.

Couples, families, solo travelers, and empty-nesters seeking a quieter coastal getaway outside peak summer. They value authentic communities, outdoor recreation, and the freedom to explore at their own pace.







WHAT THEY VALUE	Peaceful beaches, community character, outdoor recreation, local experiences, and convenient access to Charleston.
PAIN POINTS	Crowded destinations, overprogrammed vacations, limited opportunities to unwind, and uncertainty about available activities outside peak season.
EXISTING OPTIONS	Seabrook Island and other quieter coastal destinations offering privacy, recreation, and seasonal getaways.
THE IOP DIFFERENCE	A genuine, lived-in island community offering a relaxed coastal experience, outdoor recreation, and Charleston just across the Connector.
CORE BENEFITS	Greater flexibility to enjoy beaches, outdoor activities, local establishments, and Charleston without peak-summer intensity.
EMOTIONAL BENEFIT	The freedom to slow down, feel welcomed, and experience a sense of belonging rather than feeling like another tourist.

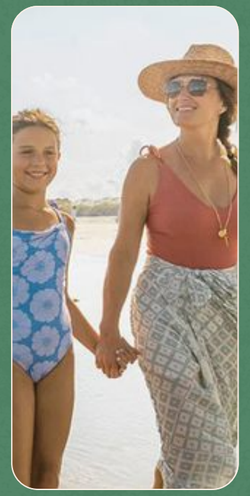
#4

Day-trippers

FOR WHOM THE CONNECTOR IS THEIR CELEBRATION.

Charleston-area residents and visitors who come to IoP for a beach day. Some have generations of memories here, while others are discovering the island for the first time.







WHAT THEY VALUE	Convenient beach access, a relaxed family-friendly atmosphere, familiar traditions, and the opportunity to enjoy the coast close to Charleston.
PAIN POINTS	Seasonal traffic, limited parking, navigating beach access, and uncertainty about local regulations (including pet-friendly beaches) and expectations.
EXISTING OPTIONS	Folly Beach and other Charleston-area beaches offering convenient coastal recreation and day-trip experiences.
THE IOP DIFFERENCE	A welcoming, lived-in island community where traditional beach days, family-friendly experiences, and neighborhood character come together.
CORE BENEFITS	Convenient access to a relaxed beach environment, family-friendly recreation, and an established coastal community close to Charleston.
EMOTIONAL BENEFIT	The familiarity and belonging of having a beach that feels like part of your own community, whether you've visited for decades or just discovered it.

Brand Messaging

BRAND PERSONALITY

The unique personality that befits a charismatic island – all its own.

WELCOMING

the behavior of home

IoP hosts its visitors as if they are new neighbors, invited to dwell in the lifestyle that the residents are so proud of.

RELAXED

the pace of home

One’s home holds their individual measure of time. On the Isle of Palms, the pace is pleasant, where daily pressure effortlessly disappears.

RESILIENT

the endurance of home

IoP has weathered great change — reshaped by Hurricane Hugo, yet rebuilt to endure. Today it faces the high tides of visitation, while keeping its character and community at its core.

STEWARDLY

the preservation of home

IoP is a place lived in and loved. The brand stewards the island's character, natural resources, and community so it stays home for generations to come.

HIERARCHY

Messaging, prioritized.

LEADING WITH WHAT ALIGNS WITH THE FAMILY-FIRST AUDIENCE.

#1 COMMUNITY

An island of neighbors, whether residential or visiting, that share in their value of a place that’s real, not a resort.

#2 TRADITION

Nostalgia that's renewed with each generation – a place that cultivates the connections that last, & the unmistakable feeling that this is where they belong.

#3 CARE

Stewardship of the island and its way of life – a place that's tended & preserved like a home, whether you live here or keep coming back.

#4 NATURAL

The way of life that feels easily-lived, where one can fall in-step with a community both proud of their place & easy in their pace.

SEASONALITY

Seasonal messaging priorities:

TRADITION

Spring

The island wakes again, and so does the feeling of coming home. The same families return, the same rhythms resume — nostalgia renewed with each generation, the way it's always been.

COMMUNITY

Summer

The island fills with neighbors — residents and returning families alike, sharing the same beach, the same pace, the same place. This is the season the community comes alive.

CARE

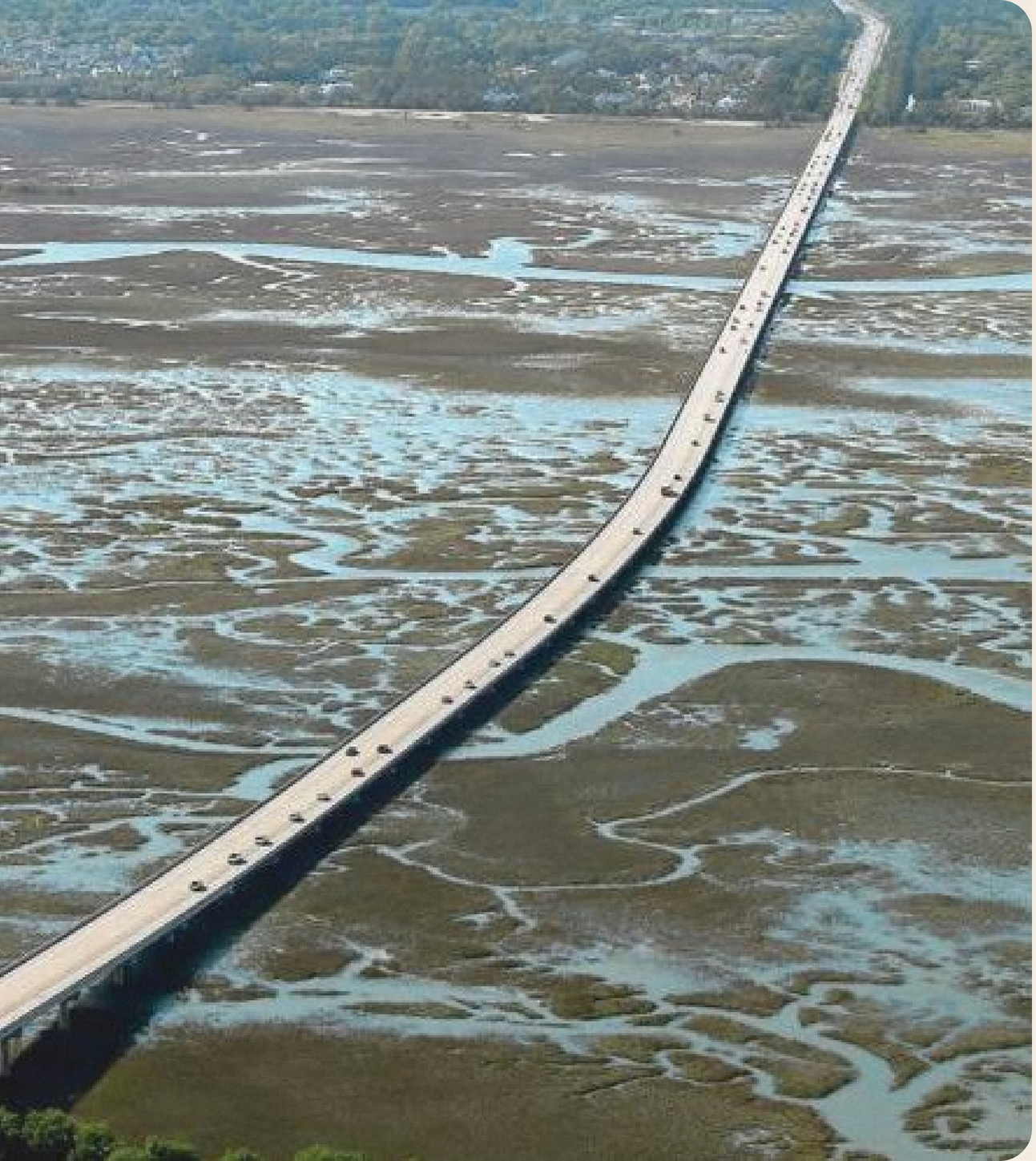
Fall

The island settles and the crowds thin. The community returns to its core, the constants for whom the care of their island is paramount.

NATURAL

Winter

The island is raw — unhurried, unadorned, nothing to prove. The way of life that feels easily-lived and evergreen, in its purest form.



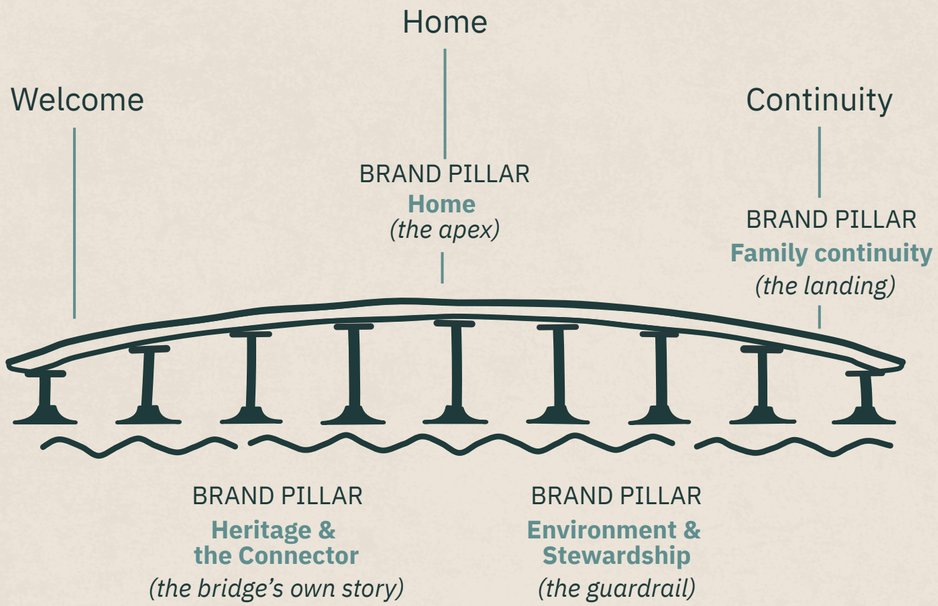
OUR STORY

The crossing over the Connector...

TO AN ISLAND THAT HAS WELCOMED PEOPLE
HOME FOR GENERATIONS.

The story arc.

THE CONNECTOR



THE ARC EXPLAINED

Welcome —

Before there was a bridge or a name, the island's first residents swam out to greet arriving settlers and carry them to shore. That first act of hospitality set the pattern for everything after: a place that welcomes you across, to the place you have somehow always belonged.

Home —

For generations, the island has been a refuge from the city's heat and hurry — where you come to slow down, to breathe, to be at ease. Cross the Connector and you feel it at the top of the bridge: you've come back to a place that feels like yours. Here, you're a neighbor for your stay.

Continuity —

The island has stayed itself across generations because its people treated it like their home – where family traditions take hold, neighbors lend each other a hand, and its lowcountry landscape is a lifestyle all its own. It's the moments that carry through each resident's season, each visitor's stay, and each generation's return to their home island.

MESSAGING FRAMEWORK

Making IOP's effortless character an effortless messaging system

FIXED CORE

Voicing core elements – that are already owned.

&

FLEXIBLE EXPRESSION

Staging the formula for carrying IOP's core through messaging.

FIXED CORE

Non-negotiable on every path.

Non-negotiable on every path: carry at least one core term — often in the "why."

If a piece can't point to one, it's not IoP.

Continued development with CVB Messaging Workshop and 2 additional development rounds.

CORE TERMS

Home *before destination*	IoP is home before it is a destination — the master frame everything else nests inside.
Protected	We preserve the island's residential character and natural resources — the why behind most civic messages.
Belonging	The invitation is to belong, not just visit — an invitation into something, not a transaction.
Continuity	Multigenerational families, year-round neighbors, and a real historical throughline from J.C. Long's 1946 development to today.

HARD RULES

Leader, never "most" – We're a leader in environmental preservation; never a superlative, especially without benchmarks to back it up.

Protecting character, never growth – Every initiative can be framed as protecting the island's character.

The Connector is ours – The bridge is the physical and emotional threshold of arrival, relief, and homecoming — no one else can claim it.

NEVER SAY...	INSTEAD, SAY:
Premier luxury	***Refined natural***
Most sustainable in SC	***A leader in environmental preservation***
Paradise / exclusive	***Home / belonging***
Growth	***Protecting character***

→ *Defensible*

Next Steps

CREATIVE BRIEF

“Our little sandbar” of neighbors –

WELCOMING YOU HOME.

The identity directive is to build a distinctive, enduring identity that expresses Isle of Palms as a traditional, lived-in coastal community – uniting civic credibility, natural character, and a genuine welcome under one recognizable brand.

CREATIVE DIRECTIVE

Welcoming, but with house rules – Extend a genuine welcome to everyone who crosses the Connector, while the identity quietly signals the values that sustain the island, so the audience self-selects.

Authentic, not manufactured – Draw from IoP's genuine sense of place, heritage, natural environment, and community character.

Distinctive, not interchangeable – Break from familiar coastal destination conventions without abandoning the island's identity.

Elevated, not exclusive – Convey quality, confidence, and understated sophistication while remaining welcoming and accessible.

Civic, not bureaucratic – Balance municipal authority with the warmth and personality of a living coastal community.

Timeless, not trendy – Establish a cohesive, adaptable identity that remains relevant across audiences, departments, and applications.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

The identity must accommodate official City communications, resident services, tourism marketing, wayfinding, digital channels, printed materials, and partner use.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Strategic alignment · Authenticity · Distinctiveness · Versatility · Longevity

NEXT STEPS

Approval for identity development:

Milestone 1 defined the direction that this developed this Brand Strategy – the position, audience, messaging, and creative direction. Today, we'd like the City to approve this strategy so that the team can continue Messaging Development and begin Visual Identity Development.

Now

WRITTEN APPROVAL DUE NOVEMBER 10, 2026

Sign-off from Douglas Kerr of this Brand Strategy in order to move into Messaging Development & Concept Selection.

Next

MESSAGING WORKSHOP WITH THE CVB BY NOVEMBER 20

A 1-hour messaging workshop with the CVB to align on direction and finalize story, tagline, and messaging framework.

Then

KICK-OFF MILESTONE 3: CONCEPT SELECTION

Visual identity development begins with concept selection, presented ~2-3 weeks after Milestone 2 approval.

After

BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Once a concept is selected, 3 full identity systems will be presented, another step closer to a fully developed identity.