

The Seaside Institute

A visionary hub for community and innovation

BY CHRISTY MILLIKEN, DIRECTOR



Town tours during the 2023 Seaside Prize.

Image courtesy of Michael Booini

Images courtesy of Brandon Babineaux

The Seaside Institute stands as a visionary organization dedicated to fostering community, promoting innovation and reimagining urban planning. Founded by Robert Davis, this influential institute has become a beacon of inspiration and a catalyst for change in the realm of sustainable and thoughtful development.

At the heart of the Seaside Institute's philosophy lies in the belief that communities should be designed with a focus on people, fostering connections and embracing the natural environment. With an emphasis on walkability, diversity and creativity, the institute has become a trailblazer in the realm of urban design, inspiring countless communities around the world.

Robert Davis, the founder of the Seaside Institute, is an entrepreneur, urban planner and advocate for livable communities. His visionary approach to urban development was realized in the creation of Seaside, the groundbreaking community that redefined the concept of a traditional town. His passion for creating vibrant and sustainable places has garnered international recognition and has set a benchmark for innovative urban planning.

Under our current advisory board of governors, the Seaside Institute has flourished into a multidisciplinary organization that offers educational programs, hosts events and conducts research. It serves as a think tank and incubator, bringing together professionals, scholars, and community leaders to explore ideas that shape the future of urban design, community engagement, and environmental stewardship.

We strive for collaborative partnerships with like-minded organizations and non-profits that will foster and strengthen the foundation of our initiatives forward. Our core focus in sustainability is a resiliency project in partnership with The Water Institute out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This project was spearheaded by our board chair and founder of Zehnder

Communications, Jeff Zehnder.

In addition to this partnership, we have partnered with The Paper Bear Film to bring awareness to the rare and rich

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biodiverse area of the Florida Panhandle and how to better protect it. The Paper Bear Project is a groundbreaking non-profit documentary that shines a spotlight on the urgent environmental issues affecting our planet and empowers viewers to take-action. Through captivating storytelling, thought-provoking visuals and interviews with environmental experts, scientists and advocates, The Paper Bear Project unveils the devastating consequences of deforestation, including habitat loss, species extinction and climate change. It invites viewers to become active participants in the movement for sustainable practices.

There is a fine art photography exhibit with artwork by Arix Zalace at the Seaside Institute to learn more about and support the film project.

Some of the other primary initiatives at the Seaside Institute include mobility such as better bike paths, smart lanes for better flow and the parking policy in Seaside.

We support the complimentary shuttle service that provides transportation for visitors to the communities along 30A. We encourage our visitors to take a break from the car and explore our communities through biking and walking. There is more to the area than just the beach to explore. We are one of America's five richest biodiverse hotspots and one of

three places in the world that embodies coastal dune lakes.

Today, the Seaside Institute continues to be a driving force in promoting livable, sustainable and inspiring communities. The institute's influence extends far beyond our own community, leaving a lasting impact on the way we envision and build our cities and towns. New Urbanism encourages less land use and more density so that you can walk and bike to nearby places. This forethought in our built environment is one that we want to inspire as a primary outcome in everything we do as we peak through our next growth spurt.

As the director of the Institute, my hope is to foster community conversations and implement action that is rooted in our core tenants which are Connectivity, Adaptability and Sustainability. If we come together as a community in alignment to have the difficult conversations and make the necessary changes, our area will be one to discover, love and protect for many generations to come.

Our signature event annually at the Seaside Institute is the Seaside Prize and is set to take place February 2-4, 2024 and will celebrate the 30th year of recognizing individuals that have made significant contributions to the quality and character of their communities and are considered the leaders of contemporary urban development and education.

Last October, we launched a podcast to connect with the community, talk about our origins and our growth and aims to encourage those to become part of the conversation in a more active way. As with any non-profit, we are supported by funding from various sources and collaborative partnerships. The best way to get involved is to come by the Institute for a visit, share your ideas and concerns, attend our symposiums and events, become a member, become a volunteer, sponsor events or make a tax-deductible contribution. Collectively, we can all make a difference.

For more information about the Seaside Institute, please visit seasideinstitute.org.