



## In the Lowcountry, marinas follow housing boom

### Communities look to add boat capacity

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When Lady's Island residents Sam and Diane Baker kept their 19-foot powerboat in the Battery Creek Marina in Port Royal, river excursions and fishing trips were almost a daily luxury.

"We would go out about five times a week," Sam Baker said. "You know, we're retired."

But the marina, a dry-stack storage facility, closed a year ago. At first, "we parked it in the backyard and let it sit there," Sam Baker said. Towing it wasn't an option unless the couple bought a more powerful truck. Leaving it in the water requires more maintenance, and the closest long-term dry storage option was in Bluffton.

Eventually, there was only one logical choice.

"We had to sell our boat," Diane Baker said.

"(But) we would like to get another one as soon as they build some more dry storage," she quickly added.

As Beaufort County keeps growing, the demand for boating-related infrastructure will naturally increase, said Sam Phlegar, a marina industry executive. It can be determined scientifically, although that is difficult, he said, but regardless, planners of hundreds of new boat slips are

trusting that it will make itself apparent when they open their marinas.

There are five marinas in northern Beaufort County: the Downtown Marina with 85 to 100 slips, Lady's Island Marina with 80 slips, Port Royal Landing with 100 slips, Dataw Island Marina with 75 "wet" slips and 75 dry and Fripp Island Marina with 65 slips and dry storage for 120 boats, although it is open only to Fripp Island Resort guests.

Three more marinas are on the drawing board: A 225-slip marina that will be part of the

Port of Port Royal redevelopment, the 150-slip dry-stack Lemon Island Marina on the Chechessee River and an 80-slip marina near the J.E. McTeer Bridge on the Beaufort River in northern Port Royal.

Planners for all three say they don't expect a problem attracting business. Tennent Houston, who oversees the Beaufort River project for Augusta, Ga.-based Merry Land Properties, said a marina to go with a yet-to-be-designed condominium development has already gotten the proper permits. He said what seems like already high demand coupled with the difficulty for other new marinas to get the proper permits makes him optimistic.

Daniel Moore, owner of the Lemon Island Marina property, said he "never really questioned the demand, given the growth." The Port Royal Town Council is considering the project, and if it approves it, Moore said he expects full occupancy by the time the facility opens.

The Port of Port Royal marina was a point of contention for town residents and leaders when redevelopment plans were being drafted for the former state-run port. Early plans called for as many as 400 slips but met significant public outcry. It was scaled back, and its size will ultimately be determined when the site is engineered.

Phlegar, who is coastal and marine director for engineering firm Applied Technology & Management, said that in coastal areas, the number of boats registered typically mirrors population. The proportion of boat owners remains relatively constant, he said.

"Whenever there's an explosion of population in a coastal zone, there is an associated expansion of need for three things," Phlegar explained: dry storage, in-water storage, known as "wet" boat slips and public access ramps, for those who trailer their boats.

Boat owners' two options for dry storage in northern Beaufort County closed in the last year. Former Battery Creek Marina owner Rick McElveen closed his facility in early 2006 because of competition with a dry-stack warehouse on the Port of Port Royal property. But that facility is now defunct as well because of the port property's redevelopment.

Landowner Daniel Moore brought his plans to annex and develop the dry-stack Lemon Island Marina, just across the Chechessee River from the island, to the council. Moore wants to develop it in Port Royal so he can build closer to the water, since setback requirements are more lenient there than those in unincorporated Beaufort County.

But residents living in the rural areas near Lemon Island say the development isn't appropriate for the area and they don't want to see Port Royal's borders expanding in their direction, possibly bringing high-density development one day. The marina faces significant opposition before final approval from the council, whose members say they will scrutinize the plans and the property before considering annexation.

Any waterfront development also brings environmental concerns, and Reed Armstrong, south coast project manager for the nonprofit conservation advocacy group the Coastal Conservation League, is among the Lemon Island Marina's opponents.

While dry-stack storage is preferred because it holds less risk of fuel leaking into the water, the Lemon Island Marina is too large for the property it's planned for, Armstrong said.

The 2.43-acre project calls for 9,600 square feet of commercial space and 16 units of storage to hold an average of nine boats each, according to the development plan.

Armstrong said it's important that what marinas do build are well-run. They need pump-out stations for boat septic systems, equipment to clean up accidental fuel spills and no-wake zones to prevent erosion of riverbanks, he said.

If given the option, boat owners in general typically prefer dry storage to avoid painting and scrubbing their boats' hulls, Phlegar said. Keeping boats on a trailer provides the same perk, but a lack of options for boaters presents a unique problem, McElveen said. Many newer communities in the county are opposed to residents storing boats in their driveways or garages for aesthetic reasons.

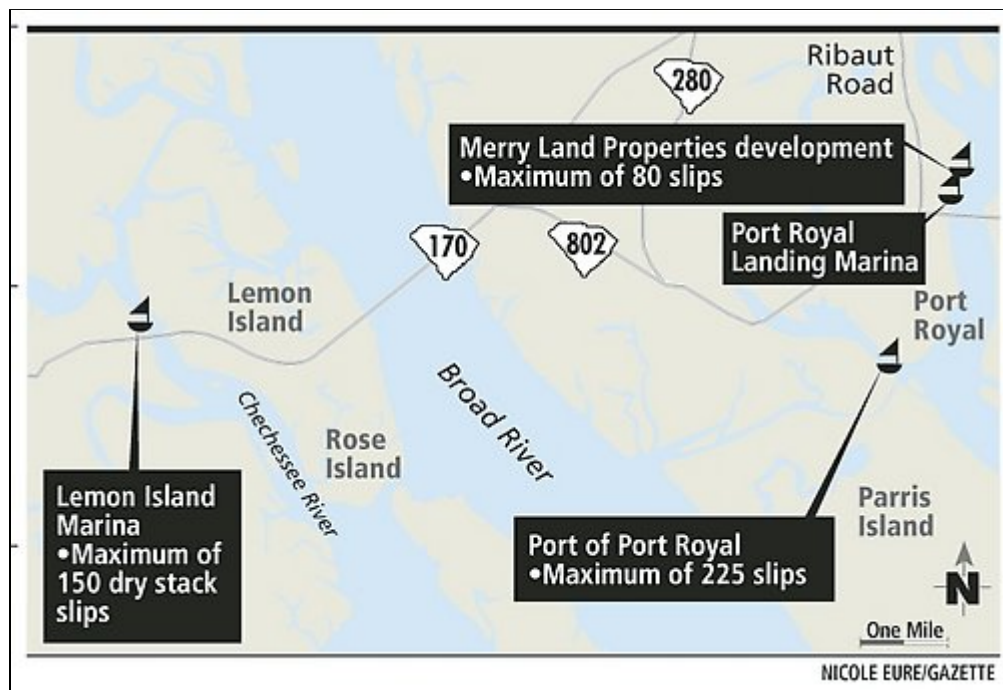
"The boats aren't going to go away, but you've got to have a place to park them," McElveen said.

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*Megan Lovett/Gazette*

Matt Baumann, of Savannah-based Matt's Mobile Marine Electronics, installs antennae on a cruiser boat Thursday at Port Royal Landing Marina.



Nicole Eure/Gazette