



2020 Hampton Street • Room 3063A
P.O. Box 192 • Columbia, SC 29202
(803) 576-2083

Minutes February 22, 2016

Attendance:

Members present: Carol Kososki, John Grego, Charles Weber, Ann Furr, Glenice Pearson, Sam Holland, and Jennifer Carter

Absent: Becky Bailey, Margaret DuBard, Jim Thomas, and Virginia Sanders

Others present:

Quinton Epps, Conservation Department
Nancy Stone-Collum, Conservation Department
Charlie Fisher, Conservation Department
Ken Driggers, Contract Legal Counsel
Kenya Bryant, Assistant Director for Richland County Recreation Commission (RCRC)

Chair, Carol Kososki called the meeting to order at 3:35pm, welcomed Kenya Bryant from RCRC and made introductions. Kenya Bryant explained RCRC has just completed a 10-year master plan that included the results from 692 poll respondents. One of the three pillars of the plan is conservation so RCRC is eager to partner with RCCC to provide the greenways, walking trails and open space that people said was their top priority. Information on their 10-year plan is available at www.vision4rcrc.com. Quinton said he had reached out to Kenya and RCRC for recreational expertise and partnership opportunities for the Mill Creek and Cabin Branch properties as well as other potential acquisitions.

Approval of Agenda: Carol requested the Conservation Director's Report be moved up in the agenda. Ann Furr made a motion to approve the agenda as amended; Glenice Pearson seconded the motion which carried.

Approval of Minutes from January 25: Charles Weber moved and Glenice seconded the motion to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Report of the Chair

Carol reported on the public meeting for the Gills Creek Greenway Section A that she, John Grego, Quinton and Nancy attended. Many of the homeowners in the area are fearful the greenway will increase crime and bring homeless people into the area. Moving the trail to the west side of the creek may be one solution to resolve homeowner concerns. Another public meeting is planned after all the public comments are considered. The Blue Ribbon Committee dealing with the flood has met twice. They have recommended a priority list of projects for the FEMA money, number one being funds for the voluntary buyout of homes.

Conservation Director's Report

Flood

Quinton showed several slides that explained the flow chart for decision making and the priority list that resulted from the Disaster Recovery Working Group and Blue Ribbon Committee. County Council will make the final decision on the list of projects to be submitted to the State FEMA program for funding. The total estimated need for the 10 project categories is \$59 million but only \$10 million is likely to be allocated to Richland County from the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). This means only the top three categories may be funded – residential buyouts, stormwater drainage management, and raising homes above the base flood elevation. Another source of funding is the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery program which has a broader range of fundable activities and potentially \$20 million for Richland County. Members questioned some of the project categories. Glenice asked how the county can go beyond buyouts to help the elderly get back to their pre-flood situation. Charles expressed his opposition to replacing the County Emergency Operations Center (#10 on the list). The next Blue Ribbon Committee meeting will be March 10.

Updates

The Concept Plan for Tourism & Economic Development in Lower Richland has been resubmitted to Procurement and should be advertised shortly. Notice to specific consulting groups and listing on planning websites should increase the number of responses. Kenya Bryant has agreed to be an evaluator.

The City of Columbia has approved an additional \$50,000 for Owens Field and RCCC will defer an easement payment until FY17 providing an additional \$50,000 to the project. With reductions from the contractor and the additional funds, the project should be able to move forward without a rebid. Details are being worked out on an intra-governmental agreement between the city and county.

The Mill Creek project is moving forward. A Request of Action will be submitted to Council in March.

Treasurer's Report

Nancy referred Commission Members to their copy of the Financial Report. The budget balance includes \$140,000 earmarked for Owens Field. This year should result in the least amount of unspent funds. The COWASEE Basin partners are planning a free workshop in April for landowners on how to manage bottomland forests for songbirds. Sessions include how conservation easements work, best management practices, and a field trip demonstration. Nancy inquired whether RCCC would be willing to finance the cost of mailing invitations for the workshop. John made a motion and was seconded by Ann to approve up to \$200 in funding for the mail out. Motion carried unanimously.

Conservation Committee Report

John reported a 160-acre parcel on Little Rice Creek in the Northeast is being offered to RCCC as a donation. The owner will hold back 50 acres of the parcel for development. The property contains longleaf pine, steep slopes, ~30 acres of wetlands, and good potential for a neighborhood passive park. Half of the wetlands border Ridge View High School and would offer the option for an outdoor classroom. Kenya commented that the access through the neighborhood could pose a problem for a park. Charles made a motion seconded by Ann for staff to continue discussions with the owner's agent. Motion passed unanimously.

Historic Committee Report

No report given

Conservation Coordinator's Report

Gills Creek Greenway Section A

The public meeting on February 11 was well attended with at least 150 people and a split of about 60% opposed and 40% in favor. Comments are being accepted on the Gills Creek Greenway Project through February 26; Nancy urged members to participate in the commenting stage of the process.

Transportation Penny staff learned they needed to be able to offer alternatives and to meet in advance with homeowner associations and local officials.

Reallocation of GCWA grant

RCCC awarded an FY16 \$20,000 grant to Gills Creek Watershed Association (GCWA) to create a Master Plan for the Wildcat Creek Greenway (Gills Creek Section B). In January, Nancy questioned GCWA staff and the Board Chair if it was worthwhile to proceed given the new understanding of how the Greenway Penny projects were being handled and the opposition from King's Grant neighborhood. GCWA concluded it was not beneficial at this time and sent a letter requesting to relinquish the grant. Nancy proposed RCCC reallocate the \$20,000 to the Owens Field project. Ann made a motion seconded by John to reallocate the funds from the GCWA grant to Owens Field. Motion passed unanimously.

Grant Updates

RCCC received four Community Conservation Grant applications and nine Historic Preservation Grant applications for a total of \$317,964. Committee meetings will be scheduled to discuss the grant proposals.

Nancy announced Commission meetings will change from the fourth Monday of each month to the **third Monday of each month. Next meeting will be March 21st.**

Respectfully submitted,
Charlie Fisher, Administrative Assistant