



Green Space Advisory Committee

Chair

MICHAEL McSHANE

Vice Chair

LAWRENCE McELLYNN

Committee Members

TOM DAVIS

LAUREL RHOTEN

CARMEN AVON MANNING

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County Administrator

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Green Space Advisory Committee Agenda

Friday, December 19, 2025 at 10:00 AM

Executive Conference Room

County Administration Building, 100 Ribaut Road, Beaufort, SC

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION OF THIS MEETING HAS BEEN PUBLISHED, POSTED, AND DISTRIBUTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE SOUTH CAROLINA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

4. REVIEW OF MINUTES

A. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 12, 2025 MEETING

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION

PURSUANT TO S.C. CODE SECTION 30-4-70 (a) (2): LEGAL ADVICE RELATED TO DISCUSSION OF NEGOTIATIONS INCIDENT TO PROPOSED CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FOLLOWING GREEN SPACE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS:

A. BUCKWALTER PUD TRACTS 5A, 5B, 5C, BLUFFTON; POLITICAL JURISDICTION – TOWN OF BLUFFTON; GEOGRAPHIC REGION – WESTERN

6. MATTERS ARISING OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

7. NEW APPLICATIONS

A. **FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION:** BROAD CREEK MARINA, HILTON HEAD ISLAND; POLITICAL JURISDICTION – TOWN OF HILTON HEAD; GEOGRAPHIC REGION – SOUTHERN

B. **FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION:** PINE GROVE PLANTATION TRACTS, SAINT HELENA ISLAND; POLITICAL JURISDICTION – UNINCORPORATED BEAUFORT COUNTY; GEOGRAPHIC REGION – EASTERN (deferred from the September 12, 2025 meeting)

C. **FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION:** HARPER TRACTS, SAINT HELENA ISLAND; POLITICAL JURISDICTION – UNINCORPORATED BEAUFORT COUNTY; GEOGRAPHIC REGION – EASTERN

D. **FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION:** PALMETTO BLUFF – PIONEER LAND & TIMBER TRACTS, BLUFFTON; POLITICAL JURISDICTION – TOWN OF BLUFFTON; GEOGRAPHIC REGION – SOUTHERN

8. OTHER BUSINESS

A. APPROVAL OF THE 2026 GREEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

B. PROJECT UPDATES

9. ADJOURNMENT

MINUTES

Green Space Advisory Committee

September 12, 2025, 10:00 AM, 2nd Floor Meeting Room, Arthur Horne Building, 104 Ribaut Road

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice Chair McElynn called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM. Vice Chair McElynn confirmed with Mark Davis that public notification of the meeting was published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the SC Freedom of Information Act.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Tom Davis
Timothy Evans
T. Peter Kristian

Carmen Avon Manning
Larry McElynn, Vice Chair
Laurel Rhoten

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Michael McShane, Chair

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Christina Bryant, Green Space Program Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department
Mark Davis, Green Space Program Manager, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department
Brian Hulbert, County Attorney
Rob Merchant, Director, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department
Graeme Philp, Attorney, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani (virtual)
Jeff Vinzani, Attorney, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani (virtual)
Juliana Zadik, Long Range Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department
Libby Anderson, Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department

GUESTS PRESENT:

Joy Coe, Rose Hill resident
Mike Hagen
Ed King, Indigo Farms
Mary Ryan Krieger, Deputy Community Plans and Liaisons Officer, MCAS
Lydia Larsen, The Island Packet
Tony LaMartina
Grant McClure, Project Manager, Coastal Conservation League
Felicia Roth, Director of Compliance and Contracts, Town of Bluffton
Bill Rauch
Sarah Sanford, Cotton Hope LLC
Kate Schaefer, Director of Land Protection, Beaufort County Open Land Trust

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Vice Chair McElynn asked to amend the agenda to include public comments. Senator Davis made a motion to amend the agenda. Laurel Rhoten seconded. Carmen Avon Manning made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Peter Kristian seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES – AUGUST 8, 2025:

Peter Kristian made a motion to adopt the minutes of the August 8, 2025 meeting. Senator Davis seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT (REGARDING BUCKWALTER PUD APPLICATIONS):

Mike Hagen said including the Inland Bluffton LLC property (Parcel 5C) in the Green Space program raises several questions. This parcel would provide an outlet for a north/south connector and includes a portion of the land needed for Phase 5B of the Bluffton Parkway. This would be funded by an initiative intended to preserve open space, not acquire land for future road building. The question is what legally enforceable concessions the Town of Bluffton is willing to make to preserve open space. Purchase of this additional property and the potential ramifications require a better understanding of what rights the Town intends to retain. Mr. Hagen said he is not suggesting the property should not be included in the Green Space initiative, but rather that the conditions of purchase actually guarantee that, short of eminent domain, that it cannot be used for major roadways.

Joy Coe said since the Foothills property and this Inland Bluffton LLC property will not be considered at the same time by County Council, what guarantee do you have they will continue with the 55 acres (Parcel 5C) as green space and not use it for development and 5B of the Bluffton Parkway. Joy said she was also concerned with the wording of the Resolution considered by the Natural Resources Committee that read, “with an opportunity to provide public passive recreation access.” This wording is very vague. The Town could put in a 3 or 4-lane highway. This is not in line with the purpose of Green Space. Joy said she hoped the Committee will strengthen the ordinance by adding, “via a gravel road and/or trails” to the end of the ordinance.

NEW APPLICATIONS:

Mark Davis used the computer screen to review the one-page summary “Green Space Funding Status” with the Committee prior to discussing new applications.

Vice Chair, McElynn, said he has asked staff to prepare a one-page funding summary to give everyone an understanding of the good work that’s being done. He would like staff to update it monthly and send out by email.

Conservation Easement Application: Cotton Hope Tracts, Sheldon:

Mark Davis said this is an application from the Open Land Trust. Mark used the computer screen to review a map showing the Cotton Hope Tracts surrounded by existing investments and conservation efforts that have been made. This property is right in the middle. Just south of this

piece is Essex Farms, a Green Space project that just recently closed. At this time, this application is being considered for due diligence.

Kate Schaefer (applicant) said from our perspective this is a “no-brainer” request for due diligence. It is either a developer oasis or a conservation asset, and we would like to see it be a conservation asset given that everything around it is protected and well-managed. The opportunity to continue to protect this Combahee River and Wimbee Creek waterfront is within reach if we are able to pursue due diligence. This is one of the remaining unprotected properties along the river. The protection of Essex gave comfort to the neighbors and Cotton Hope makes even more sense to be protected as well. This property is high priority for the military so there is a partnership opportunity with the Marine Corps.

Sarah Sanford said she is one of four property owners who all want to see the property protected. We are excited to see it go into conservation if possible.

Tim Evans asked Kate if there had been any discussion about the balance of Smith and Big Tree. Kate said not at this time.

Tim Evans said this is plugging a hole. With what you’re looking to conserve right now, tying into the ACE basin refuge just above this, it is a multi-thousand-acre block of protected property. He made a motion to move the application forward to the Natural Resources Committee with a recommendation to conduct due diligence. The motion was seconded by Peter Kristian.

Carmen Avon Manning asked if the military is contributing. Kate said there will be leveraging of some kind. It would be fiscal year 2027 REPI. The program is still healthy.

Carmen Avon Manning asked if there had been a water quality study on the St. Helena Sound since the 1985 study. Tim Evans said he didn’t think there had been any substantial testing; the point of the report at that time is that compared to everything else around it, this is the best watershed. Carmen said it was an excellent report, but it had a lot of qualifiers. Carmen said her main point is it’s not good to be happy with a report that’s 40 years old.

In response to a question from Vice Chair McElynn, Mark Davis said we usually request \$25,000 to \$35,000 for due diligence.

Vice Chair McElynn asked if there were any objections to passing the motion. There were no objections, the motion passed.

Fee Simple Application: Buckwalter PUD Parcel 5C, Bluffton:

Mark Davis used the computer screen to review a map showing the location of Buckwalter Parcel 5C in relation to 5A and 5B—parcels the Committee previously considered. There are easements on 5C that are of concern to residents. In the recommendation on Parcels 5A and 5B, the GSAC encouraged the Town of Bluffton to pursue Parcel 5C. The Town has done that, and their application is in front of you today for due diligence consideration.

Felicia Roth (applicant) said this is the keystone piece for our prior application. We are pleased we were able to bring it to you so quickly. This is a different landowner than Parcels 5A and 5B. Parcel 5C is 55.2 acres. There are significant uplands—36 acres. This represents to us an opportunity to remove possible commercial space and dwelling units from development. Mark Davis added the Town of Bluffton is a financial partner in the application.

In response to a question from Vice Chair McElynn, Felicia said they have a contract on the property and have started due diligence. The appraised value is \$3,860,000 and that is the purchase price. Mark Davis clarified the ask from the Town is not that full value. Felicia said they have pulled out the value of existing easements and added that the Town is not in the business of building roads; however, 20 years from now, a government could come in and condemn land to put in a road. What we would like to do is master plan a park of almost 300 acres and to traverse that acreage, we will need pathways and bike paths. This is a legacy project. We are asking for \$2.7 million from Green Space.

Senator Davis made a motion to move the application forward to the Natural Resources Committee with a recommendation to conduct due diligence. The motion was seconded by Peter Kristian.

Carmen Avon Manning said she was surprised to read the Resolution pertaining to the Foothills property (Parcels 5A and 5B) presented to the Natural Resources Committee. The Resolution doesn't say anything about protecting wetlands, and that is one of the things we did talk about. The reason this is important is that it is in the May River watershed. Carmen said her other concern was the last sentence in the Resolution which said the opportunity to provide public passive recreation access. A passive park may have a road. Her concern is that language may allow a 3-lane highway.

Peter Kristian said all we are doing at this time is due diligence. It will come back to us and at that time we can put whatever stipulations we want on it. Vice Chair McElynn said Ms. Manning's concerns are noted.

Mark Davis said the Resolution Carmen is referring to does not get recorded. The grant agreement and covenants get recorded which are the teeth for the land protection.

Felicia said the Buckwalter PUD also has wetlands protections and asked the committee not to go beyond its scope so we can all achieve a significant gain which is to stop the development.

Vice Chair McElynn asked if there were any objections to passing the motion to move the application along for due diligence. There were no objections, the motion passed.

Tim Evans reminded the group that we are an advisory body, not a regulatory body.

Fee Simple Application: Pine Grove Plantation Tracts, St. Helena Island:

Mark Davis used the computer screen to review a map showing the location of the properties. They are located about one mile from Sea Island Parkway and approximately 29 acres in total. This is a fee simple application that has been submitted directly to the County by the owner with the intention of the County being the owner and operator. Considering this, it would require some type of public access. Currently, there are some road access and easement encumbrances on the land—some old roads coming across the property.

Vice Chair McElynn asked if the applicant is the sole owner or if deeds had been assembled from heirs' property. Mark said this would be part of due diligence.

Vice Chair McElynn asked what the significance of this property is. Though the Open Land Trust is not the applicant, Kate Schaefer said that she could speak to this. She said the property came to the Rural and Critical Program about two years ago, but the property owner was not quite ready at the time. They visited the property as part of due diligence. There is hardwood canopy at the front of the property and open agricultural land at the back. There may be partnerships for agricultural leases because there are often aspiring farmers who are looking to lease land.

There was discussion of possible access to nearby Big House Cemetery, a traditional Gullah burial ground.

Peter Kristian asked how much potential development would be removed by acquisition. Mark said this is agricultural zoning--T2R, 1 unit/3 acres--and is also located in the Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO). There are some existing lots on the property. If the property were reconfigured, perhaps 10 lots could be created.

Vice Chair McElynn asked if it would be advisable to defer a decision on due diligence and have County staff come back to the committee with an idea of costs. Mark said staff could get with the Passive Parks Director and come back with some general cost estimates. Vice Chair McElynn said he doesn't want to take action to obligate funds to do something and then have someone say they don't want to do that. He has spoken with the Chair who agrees to defer. Peter Kristian made a motion to defer the application until the Committee can get some guidance from the County on what their level of interest is and possible improvement costs. The motion was seconded by Tim Evans.

Carmen Avon Manning congratulated the landowner for coming forward with the application.

Vice Chair McElynn asked if there were any objections to moving forward with the motion to defer. There were no objections, the motion passed.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Update on Green Space Projects from the September 2, 2025 Natural Resources Committee Meeting:

Mark Davis said there were three applications for due diligence considered at the September 2 Natural Resources meeting. All three were recommended for approval. Additionally, two projects were recommended for funding—Parcels 5A and 5B of the Buckwalter PUD, and the Buckfield Tracts, Phase I. Mark said these two projects will next be presented at the September 22 County Council meeting for approval by Resolution. Once approved by County Council, staff will work with the applicants on the grant agreement and covenants that are required to be recorded on the land.

Vice Chair McElynn said we have opportunity within the Green Space Program Ordinance to consider buying down development rights. That hasn't been coming in, so please think about this: Is there any area that we want to address in that regard so we can consider applications to buy down those development rights and the land that goes with it?

Tim Evans said in Bluffton, there are more development rights than there is land. It is important that we consider whether the development rights are tied to the land or go with the owner. We have to be careful not to buy down phantom development rights.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:03 AM.

Minutes compiled by Libby Anderson, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department