

MINUTES

Green Space Advisory Committee

July 18, 2025, 10:00 AM, 2nd Floor Meeting Room, Arthur Horne Building, 104 Ribaut Road

CALL TO ORDER:

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

Chair McShane asked the Committee to look at August 8 for a possible special called meeting. He stated the purpose is that there is a Natural Resources Committee meeting on September 2, and there is a good chance there will be projects ready to consider to make the September 2 Natural Resources Committee meeting. The Green Space Committee agreed that August 8 worked for the meeting at 10:00 AM, TBD location.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Tom Davis

Timothy Evans

T. Peter Kristian

Carmen Avon Manning

Larry McElynn, Vice Chair

Michael McShane, Chair

Laurel Rhoten

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

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)

Juliana Zadik, Long Range Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department

Libby Anderson, Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dana Bauer, South Carolina Sentinal Landscape Coordinator

Ed Farley, Ducks Unlimited

Jacob Ham, Intern, Coastal Conservation League

Ed King, Indigo Farms

Mary Ryan Krieger, Deputy Community Plans and Liaisons Officer, MCAS

Grant McClure, Project Manager, Coastal Conservation League
Felicia Roth, Director of Compliance and Contracts, Town of Bluffton
Caylor Romines, Director of Land Stewardship, Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Elvio Tropeano
Joy Coe

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Tim Evans made a motion to approve the agenda. Senator Davis seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JUNE 13, 2025:

Peter Kristian made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 13 meeting. Carmen Avon Manning seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Chair McShane said that at Monday night's County Council meeting, they approved the \$6 million reimbursable grant to go to The Nature Conservancy and the Open Land Trust for acquisition of Chelsea Plantation. That is a historic action. Chair McShane said that no county he is aware of has made a commitment, for the second time, to put money into a neighboring county, much less do it on a reimbursable basis, to front money that will come from our friends at the Department of Defense so that the transaction doesn't get lost. It was slated to go from 2,700 acres of rural land to well above 4,000 units on a road that doesn't have the infrastructure to support it; and it would all fall on Beaufort County. Chair McShane said he congratulates County Council for taking that courageous step. Chair McShane said this would never have occurred unless Senator Davis entered this legislation years ago.

Senator Davis referred to an article in the paper recently that said there will be 14,000 new homes near the intersection of Exit 8 and I-95. That will have an impact on the quality of life in Beaufort County. That's why it makes sense to look at this regionally.

Chair McShane said the task now is to fill in the gap between Gregorie Neck and Chelsea on SC 462 so that we have an ecosystem strategy going on. Chair McShane said he encourages our partners to be aggressive. Tim Evans said it's a neighborhood that is ripe for conservation. Chair McShane said he offers every resource he has access to be of assistance on this. This should be our #1 priority, so we may be coming back to County Council with some additional projects that are out of the county.

Vice Chair McElynn said that after Chair McShane made his presentation to County Council on Monday, County Council endorsed the proposal with enthusiasm. They understand what they are committing to, and they are completely committed to seeing it through. It was a good feeling to see that there is that kind of cooperative understanding.

Chair McShane reported that Senator Davis, Vice Chair McElynn and he were all reappointed by County Council to serve on the Advisory Committee for four-year terms. The other Advisory Committee members—the regional representatives—have two years remaining on their terms.

ANNUAL ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Peter Kristian made a motion to appoint Mike McShane to serve as chair and Larry McElynn to serve as vice chair due to their expertise and leadership. Senator Davis seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Carmen Avon Manning made a motion to go into Executive Session pursuant to S.C. Code Section 30-4-70 (A) (2): discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements for the following proposed Green Space applications: Fee Simple Application, Buckwalter PUD Tracts; Fee Simple Application, Sea Island Parkway Tracts; and Fee Simple Application, Messick Tracts. Peter Kristian seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

The Committee was in Executive Session from 10:10 AM to 10:57 AM.

MATTERS ARISING OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION:***Fee Simple Application: Messick Tracts, Beaufort***

Laurel Rhoten made a motion to authorize staff to continue negotiations with the applicant as discussed. Peter Kristian seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Fee Simple Application: Sea Island Parkway Tracts, Beaufort

Laurel Rhoten made a motion to recommend moving forward with negotiations for the fee simple acquisition of the tracts not to exceed \$2.25 million, with the School District as the intended owner and that the School Board consider restrictions on the adjacent waterfront property that they already own. Tim Evans seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous. Chair McShane clarified that the Committee is asking the School Board to consider additional restrictions on the current property they own that is on the waterfront adjacent to the subject tracts.

Fee Simple Application: Buckwalter PUD Tracts, Bluffton

Senator Davis asked staff to put the map of the tracts on the computer screen. Senator Davis said the Town of Bluffton has applied for a \$2,143,678 grant from Green Space to facilitate the acquisition of the tracts outlined in yellow on the map. The motion is to recommend approval of that application to the County subject to the requirement that in addition to the statutory restrictions that get attached to a property when Green Space funds are used which puts it into conservation in perpetuity, that in addition to that, the Town of Bluffton simultaneously grant a covenant on the land to a qualified entity, restricting it for preservation purposes in perpetuity. In addition, there are two strong encouragements to the Town: 1. That it explore a MOU or other agreement with the PRT to have park facilities, amenities--things of that nature-- put on the acquired tracts so the public could access and enjoy the land; and 2. That the Town pursue acquisition in good faith of the 55 acres which is the piece between the two tracts outlined in yellow (the subject tracts). It is contiguous to the parcels being acquired, and it would be a good

addition to the park as a whole to have that included—understanding that it is a complex property. Chair McShane suggested adding that the Green Space Committee stands ready with its resources (financial and members) to assist; Senator Davis said he, as a real estate attorney, is willing to help as well. Tim Evans seconded. Carmen Avon Manning said this is a great project for Bluffton. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Update on Chelsea Tracts Reimbursable Grant

Chair McShane said we talked earlier about congratulating Beaufort County Council for their courage on the Chelsea Tracts reimbursable grant. We know we will be coming back to County Council with a traditional Green Space grant application, probably \$2 million. We know Jasper County is working on the structure of their program; they hope to have it completed and ready to go in September. An application will also be submitted to the State Conservation Bank so the Board can look at it during its September meeting.

In response to a question from Vice Chair McElynn, Chair McShane said the requested funding for Chelsea will be about equal across the board--\$2 million from Beaufort County, \$2 million from Jasper County, and \$2 million from the State Conservation Bank. This is based on the estimated easement value of \$12 million. The Department of Defense's program allows them to pay up to 50% of that estimate, hence the \$6 million.

Tim Evans observed that moving from Gregorie Neck, where we stuck our neck out, and now Jasper County is going to be an equal partner.

Chair McShane said the investment by the County will ultimately be approximately \$2 million in a normal grant and the interest on the \$6 million reimbursable grant which is minimal.

Chair McShane asked staff to update the project status spreadsheet after today's meeting and distribute it to the Committee and to County Council.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM.

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