

MINUTES

Green Space Advisory Committee

December 19, 2025, 10:00 AM, Executive Conference Room, 100 Ribaut Road

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair McShane called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Chair McShane said 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

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

Amanda Flake, Natural Resource Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department

Dylan Kidd, Deputy County Attorney

Michael Moore, County Administrator

Graeme Philp, Attorney, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani

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

Libby Anderson, Planner, Beaufort County Planning & Zoning Department

GUESTS PRESENT:

Teri Aigner, Pine Grove Plantation

Nicte Barrientos, Town of Hilton Head

Josh Bell, Lowcountry Land Trust

Joy Coe, resident

David Bishop, The Nature Conservancy

Ben Brown, Town of Hilton Head

Alice Howard, Chair, Beaufort County Council

Nate Jones, Broad Creek Marina

Caylor Romines, Director of Land Stewardship, Beaufort County Open Land Trust

Kate Schaefer, Director of Land Protection, Beaufort County Open Land Trust

Kristin Williams, Executive Director, Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Kathleen Young, Pine Grove Plantation

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Vice Chair McElynn made a motion to approve the agenda. Peter Kristian seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES – September 12, 2025:

Vice Chair McElynn made a motion to adopt the minutes of the September 12, 2025 meeting. Laurel Rhoten seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chair McShane asked if there was any public comment. There was no public comment.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Vice Chair McElynn 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: Buckwalter PUD Tracts 5A, 5B, 5C, Bluffton. Tim Evans seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

The Committee was in Executive Session from 10:02 AM to 10:53 AM.

MATTERS ARISING OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Chair McShane said that no actions were taken during Executive Session; however, there is a motion to be made.

Senator Davis said it is his understanding that the Town of Bluffton had moved forward without Green Space dollars to close on the purchase of Buckwalter PUD Parcels 5A and 5B. It was a matter of timing and having to abide by deadlines and the agreements regarding covenants and restrictions that were not finalized. Senator Davis made a motion to invite the Town of Bluffton to reapply for reimbursement of the money they spent to purchase Parcels 5A and 5B and that staff continue to negotiate with the Town regarding the covenants. Peter Kristian seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Senator Davis said he would communicate this information to the Town.

NEW APPLICATIONS:

Fee Simple Application: Broad Creek Marina, Hilton Head Island:

Mark Davis used the computer screen to review the application. Mark said this application had come before the Committee previously and the Committee did not recommend funding. The Town has reapplied. Mark said this is now an equal partnership. The Town is requesting \$7.7 million and has committed to restoring the property to its natural state for a passive public park.

Ben Brown, representing the applicant, said in the 1990s, the Town had acquired an adjacent parcel of about 20 acres. Ben said Town Council has received a lot of questions about land acquisition of the marina property because the property is underdeveloped. It has the entitlement of 152 multifamily units up to 75' in height and would likely be developed as high-end multifamily or timeshare units. The Town would like to keep the existing pavilion/pole barn and the restrooms, as these could be incorporated into some nice open space.

In response to a question from Chair McShane, Ben said the intent is to manage the two properties together, remove the development entitlements, and ask for \$7.7 million, which is ½ of the Town's appraised value.

In response to a question from Peter Kristian, Ben said the go-cart tract will be demolished and there will be no cross-easements or parking easements with the marina. In response to a question from Vice-Chair McElynn, Ben said the existing ropes course will be removed.

Vice-Chair McElynn asked about several small businesses near the existing marina. Nate Jones, representing the property owner, said these are on the marina property.

Tim Evans said the committee originally had issues with the amount of impervious surface on the marina site and potential issues regarding exceeding the impervious surface percentage. He asked how this application affects that. Mark Davis said since the original application was submitted, a new parcel has been created. Tim asked whether the other lot would become noncompliant if this application moves ahead. Ben Brown said no, the Town of Hilton Head's Planning Department approved the subdivision and made sure no nonconformities were created.

Laurel Rhoten asked if the property owner is donating any value as a bargain sale. Ben said the property owner is convinced the property is worth \$16 million. The Town has conveyed to the property owner that it will not pay more than appraised value. The current appraisal was done in February 2025.

Carmen Avon Manning asked about the reference to a ferry permit. Nate Jones said the ferry permit is attached to the subject property and the permit could possibly be amended for private docks. Ben said the Town's application does not envision a ferry; the Town's application is for open space for the community. In response to a question from Chair McShane, Ben said the Town has talked about a kayak launch on the adjoining property, but it might be better located on the subject property.

In response to a question from Carmen Avon Manning, Ben said if the Town received Green Space funding, they would program money into their capital program to restore the site and create trails.

Chair McShane clarified that all the applications being considered today are for due diligence and would not go before the Natural Resources Committee for approval for due diligence until

February 2. Chair McShane said it's important for the property owners to understand that a final decision would not be made until the 2nd or 3rd quarter of 2026.

Peter Kristian made a motion to move the application to the Natural Resources Committee with a recommendation to conduct due diligence. The motion was seconded by Tim Evans. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Fee Simple Application: Pine Grove Plantation Tracts, Saint Helena Island:

Chair McShane said the Committee had a preliminary discussion on this application at their last meeting which he apologized for missing. Mark Davis said the Committee recommended deferral of the application and requested some additional information. In the meantime, staff received an application for adjoining parcels called the Harper Tracts. These are separate applications with different owners. Both are fee simple applications requesting the County to purchase the properties and operate them as passive parks that provide public access, so issues surrounding County ownership and operation need to be considered. Mark used the computer screen to review maps of the properties. Both properties have frontage on Seaside Road.

Kathleen Young, applicant, said her family has owned the land since 2005. She said the big thing about her land is the Avenue of Oaks. This was the first free school for formerly enslaved people, not Penn Center. The property has three dock permits and there is a well on the property.

Tim Evans asked about access to the cemetery. Teri Aigner said there are no gates on Ms. Young's property. Ms. Young said she has never stopped people from accessing the cemetery.

Chair McShane asked staff if the County has a priority interest in owning the property and if so, how is the County going to manage it. Mark Davis said this not a priority of County staff but if it is the pleasure of the Committee and the County to consider these, staff recommends the parcels be considered together, understanding the issues that come with them.

Laurel Rhoten asked about access to the cemetery, an issue that has been in the news recently. Teri Aigner owns the adjoining property and is assisting Ms. Young with this project. She referenced Everest Road which is a private road, and pointed out her property on the map, and the location of her gate. She said Ms. Young does not have a locked gate on her property; the next locked gate is on the Harper property.

Laurel Rhoten referenced the memo from the Land Preservation Department and asked if there was any money that supports development of the property as a passive park. Mark Davis responded no there is not.

Peter Kristian asked about the development potential for the property. Mark said the property is zoned T2R which allows 1 unit/3 acres. There are 12 existing parcels on the property. Chair McShane said 7 units might be developed on the Harper tracts.

In response to a question from Carmen Avon Manning, Mark Davis clarified that if the County takes ownership, there needs to be a public access plan.

Senator Davis clarified that by taking both applications together, there are about 50 acres of land and that both applications are for fee simple acquisition.

Ms. Young said she has been approached by a developer to develop the property, and she doesn't want to do that.

Mark Davis said there is no bargain sale offer; they are requesting 100% of the appraised value for both applications.

Chair McShane asked if the owner of the Harper Tracts would be interested in a conservation easement. Mark said this was brought up in the pre-application conference; however, they asked for a fee simple application.

Peter Kristian asked if the property could be rezoned. Mark Davis said this is in a rural part of the County and it is in the Cultural Protection Overlay.

Chair McShane said he would ask both applicants to give some thought to a new application for a conservation easement which can bring dollars to the tract. Peter Kristian made a motion that both applicants be encouraged to reapply with conservation easement applications. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair McElynn.

Senator Davis said it is 50 acres of land. Chair McShane said that is the value—50 acres of conservation that he'd like to see. Senator Davis said the committee is under a mandate to utilize the money that was collected to purchase these tracts or a conservation easement, but a conservation easement is not what the owner wants to do. The objection he hears is that the 50 acres is not a county priority. If there are 50 acres of land adjacent to the water with possibilities for public use, why is it not a county priority?

Tim Evans asked what the County's responsibility would be, given that Everest Road is not a county road and there is an existing easement to create public access. Mark Davis said he cannot speak to this, as there other County departments involved. There would be a process to convert a private road to a county road. Chair McShane asked if this could be done during due diligence. He would be open to this.

Peter Kristian said his concern is that the amount of density to be removed is not that great. Senator Davis said the low density would be reflected in the appraised value and said, don't underestimate the persuasive power of developers in the future. Peter Kristian said he withdraws his motion.

Tim Evans asked what kind of burden this would place on the County. Michael Moore said the departments can certainly provide input, but from the County Council perspective, there needs

to be consideration on whether more fee simple properties can be acquired and maintained at public expense in perpetuity.

Senator Davis made a motion to move the application to the Natural Resources Committee, with a recommendation to conduct due diligence. Vice Chair McElynn seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Joy Coe said she was under the impression that some properties might be protected in a natural condition. Chair McShane said that under the County ordinance, if the property is purchased fee-simple by the County, there must be a public access plan. Graeme Philp agreed this is true for County-owned properties. Chair McShane said that is the application at the moment. If an entity made an application to purchase this property to keep it in its natural condition, that may be part of the discussion, but the current application is for the County to buy the property.

Fee Simple Application: Palmetto Bluff, Town of Bluffton:

Mark Davis used the computer screen to review the application. The applicant is The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The application is to preserve 4,920 acres. This is part of the Palmetto Bluff Planned Development and has a Development Agreement on it. Staff is working with the Town of Bluffton and is waiting for additional information to complete its assessment. Staff recommends deferral until the January GSAC meeting.

David Bishop, applicant, said he had been talking with the landowners since 2018. He said it's kind of squishy, but Palmetto Bluff is required to maintain 5,000 acres of managed forest and they have been swapping land here and there and it's a complicated history that is ever-changing. Finally, he and the landowners came to a deal and said there is an opportunity to create a massive public space. The price in 2018 was \$4,000/acre and now it is much higher. TNC has talked with the Forestry Commission, and they would be interested in doing this if there is local leadership interest. TNC is not sure what the appropriate split between the state and the county would be, TNC is just saying there is a deal to be had if the committee wanted it. TNC would be happy to play a role similar to the Chelsea project--TNC takes title, then a forestry-friendly easement with the land trust.

Kate Schaefer referenced the County-owned 800 acres referred to as New Riverside Park. The subject property would be contiguous to this County-owned property. It could improve public access to both parcels. When you think of the development agreement, keep in mind this would be unfragmented, contiguous open space which may be different than how a developer may define open space, but the development agreement does afford some protection for the property. The development threat is not as urgent as a property that has a competing offer, but the opportunity to purchase and protect it is only going to get more expensive and more difficult as the years go on. Mayor Toomer has submitted a letter in support from Town Council. David said this is not under contract because this is an unusual project. He suggested moving forward with due diligence and obtaining the information from the Town. Kate said this would also make the opportunity seem more real and other partners would invest their time, including the landowner and the Forestry Commission.

Chair McShane asked if there is value in waiting for a decision until more information is received from the Town. He would also like to see something from the State Forester and for the County Administrator to look at the 800-acre tract to see if there is active management going on; it could be easily incorporated into a 5,800-acre tract managed by the Forestry Commission and take the burden off the County and still give recreational public access.

In response to a question from Tim Evans, David Bishop said there is 13 miles of frontage on the New River. Chair McShane said the 800 acres the County has plays a huge role in access to the rest of the property. Kate Shaefer mentioned other properties upstream that have been or may be protected.

In response to a question from Senator Davis, David Bishop said if an agreement could be made on how to do the project, then TNC could put the property under contract. Chair McShane said the Green Space Program could advance a reimbursable grant that would come back to the County, but those metrics must be articulated. David said he thought the state could contribute a certain amount that would reimburse. The price tag is \$40 to \$42 million.

Chair McShane said if the committee wants to move forward with this, conversations are needed with state resource agencies. David said TNC also thought about giving part of the property (the portion that is wet, about 700 acres), to the Palmetto Bluff Conservancy. Senator Davis asked if there might be possibilities for federal forestry funding.

Carmen Avon Manning said she would like more rigor in all the applications and asked why the property is significant. This is considered the managed forest section of the development and there are no development units associated with it, so she asked what would be preserved. Mark Davis said this is a fair question and others have asked that, but there are some uses that could be developed and staff is seeking that official information from the Town. Currently it is private land, and the proposal would provide public access. Chair McShane said it would expand the public trust.

Peter Kristian said this is a very large piece of land and doing due diligence will bring information forward so that the committee can make a more informed decision.

Senator Davis made a motion to move the application to the Natural Resources Committee, with a recommendation to conduct due diligence. Peter Kristian seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Chair McShane said an update on the project will be provided at the January meeting and suggested having a representative from the Forestry Commission at that meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS:**Approval of the 2026 Green Space Advisory Committee Meeting Schedule:**

Chair McShane reviewed the recommended dates for the 2026 Green Space Advisory Committee meetings. The dates have been selected to line up with the Natural Resources Committee meetings. Chair McShane said he and the Vice Chair had a conversation earlier today about changing the review procedure to come straight to Council with the recommendation for due diligence and come back to full Council for final approval to expedite and accelerate these opportunities. This would be a discussion for Council to have. It would likely require a change to the ordinance. There was no objection to the proposed meeting schedule.

Project Updates:

Mark used the computer screen to review the project tracker spreadsheet.

Tim Evans said they had a site visit at the Campbell tracts. The project is located at the roundabout at US 17. This is the gateway, the scenic entrance, to Beaufort. Tim said he thinks this is an easy project that needs to move ahead.

Peter Kristian discussed the site visit to the Simmons property. It is on Spanish Wells Road. There is access to the marsh. They are asking for a conservation easement to allow two houses to stay on the parcel. There is a Native Islander cemetery on the property. It is a beautiful piece of property that could be developed into many homes. He said the committee should look at this property very carefully.

Senator Davis asked about the status of Victoria Bluff. Kate Schaefer said the appraisal has been ordered and should be back mid-January. She also said there is an additional 22 acres adjacent to the property that is now for sale, so there is an opportunity to add to the proposal.

Mark Davis said that although the Cheslea project is out of county, it has a huge impact on the western geographic region of the County.

In response to the comment from Ms. Coe, Peter Kristin said there are many weapons in our quiver to prevent a property from being developed. The committee is 100% for open space, but getting development off the map is our primary objective.

Vice Chair McElynn said he has heard the concern loud and clear with regard to reducing the review time for applications.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 PM.

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