



RURAL AND CRITICAL LANDS PRESERVATION BOARD

Friday, March 8, 2019, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Bluffton Public Library
Large Conference Room
120 Palmetto Way, Bluffton, SC 29910
Phone: (843) 255-2140

Members:

Michael Mathews, District 9 (Chair)
Richard Walls, District 7
Bob Bender, District 4
Terry Hill, District 6
Douglas Koop, District 5
Walter Mack, District 3
Gail O'Kane, District 11
Dorothy Scanlin, District 10
Beekman Webb, District 2 (Vice Chair)
Vacant, Districts 1 and 8

Staff:

Eric Greenway, Planning Director
Amanda Flake, Natural Resources Planner

AGENDA

1. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

2. REVIEW OF AGENDA

3. CITIZEN COMMENTS

4. REGULAR SESSION – General Discussion

A. Response to Public Input Session and Questionnaire – number of responses, form of documentation and where results can be accessed. ([backup](#))

a. Effectively Aligning the R & C Program Goals with Community Expectations and Stakeholder/Partner Goals

- i. Public input summary for Questions 9 & 10
- ii. Board discussion/recommendations – document/articulate, set aside for Project Ranking Criteria discussion

b. Rank of Importance for Potential Land Acquisition Goals

- i. Public input summary for Question 1
- ii. Public input summary for Question 2 – additional factors to consider
- iii. Board discussion/recommendations – document/articulate, set aside for Project Ranking Criteria discussion

- c. Specific Geographic Areas, Specific Properties, Suggested Initiatives
 - i. Public input summary for Questions 4, 5, and 6
 - ii. Board discussion/recommendations [Recommendations would be taken into consideration during Greenprint process]
- d. Project Criteria Ranking Sheets
 - i. Public input summary for the Project Ranking Criteria sheets, Question 3
 - ii. Presentation of different format/structure options for ranking
 - iii. Program staff recommendation of revised format/structure ranking sheets
 - iv. Board discussion/recommendations, incorporating previous discussions

Working Lunch (12:00 p.m.)

B. Specific Program Issues Addressed in Questionnaire:

- a. Transparency regarding Acquisition Approvals
 - i. Current process for approvals & history
 - ii. Public input summary for Question 8
 - iii. Board discussion/recommendations
- b. Opportunities for Other Organizations to Participate in Project Submissions
 - i. Current process for project development
 - ii. Public input summary for Question 7
 - iii. Board discussion/recommendations

C. Wrap Up and Next Steps

- a. Additional Comments
 - i. Public input summary for Question 11
 - ii. Board discussion
- b. Greenprint - next steps

5. REVIEW OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 14, 2019 ([backup](#))

6. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

7. OTHER

A. Next Meeting: Thursday, April 11, 2019, 3:00 p.m., Beaufort Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, 6 Snake Road, Beaufort, SC 29909.



1. The following categories of potential land acquisition have been identified in the Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Ordinance. Of these categories, how would you rank them in order of the highest priority and why?

- a. Natural resource protection
- b. Historic or cultural significance
- c. Passive recreation potential
- d. Scenic views, scenic vistas
- e. Deterrence of detrimental land use patterns, traffic congestion

Answers:

(Anon1): a, b, c, d, e; use funding from other sources to deter land use and traffic issues

(Anon2): e, a, b, c, d

(TNC): We lean towards "a" as the highest priority. We would like to see increased focus placed on larger tracts that are cost-effective, which would largely be based in northern BC and St. Helena

2. What other important factors do you believe should be considered for a land preservation project and why?

Answers:

(Anon1): Public access and wildlife/habitat corridors/connections

(Anon2): Stormwater management; to reduce pollutants run-off; reduce flooding potential; and reduce soil erosion.

(TNC): The intersection of nature and people. For example, look at where to invest to reduce flooding or allow for inland marsh migration associated with sea level rise

3. Do you have any specific comments for modifying and improving the Project Criteria Ranking Sheets not related to the above-mentioned prioritization of projects?

Answers:

(Anon1): The Public Benefits section of the Critical Lands ranking sheet should be revised. The Recreational Benefits and Public Access categories should be more highly weighted than the



Vista Protection and Traffic Congestion categories. I also think the Post Sale Costs should be more highly weighted in the Financial section of the Critical Lands ranking sheet. On the PDR ranking sheet, I think the Ecological Benefits and the Proximity to Other Protected Lands should have their weighted percentages flip-flopped.

(Anon2): Re-weight land conservation criteria that address the greater interests of and benefits to the citizens of Beaufort County.

(TNC): Leverage is important. There is a big opportunity to leverage USDA dollars on St. Helena through their ag easement program. Need to be thoughtful about capping payment rates for future Port Royal Sound-related work.

4. Are there specific areas of importance in the County that you believe should be protected and why?

Answers:

(Anon1): Fill in the gaps within and/or adjacent to properties for the benefit of wildlife corridors

(Anon2): Low-lying properties and waterways inundated by floodwater and stormwater run-off and gradual sea level rise; properties that once developed will interfere with natural waterways and/or connect waterways.

(TNC): Review our model for the Port Royal Sound watershed, which looked at a diverse suite of characteristics associated with protecting water quality and flooding/marsh migration.

5. Are there specific properties in the County that you believe should be protected, what are they and why?

Answers:

(Anon1): I don't know

(Anon2): No answer given

(TNC): Parcels greater than 10 acres; farm lands on St. Helena that will be crucial for future marsh migration



6. Do you have suggestions for specific initiatives that the Program should consider undertaking?

Answers:

(Anon1): Look into more partnerships and grants for cost sharing

(Anon2): Review the TPL study of "Economic Benefits of Parks, Trails, and Conserved Open Spaces in Beaufort County"; leverage funds; extend partnerships; develop and execute a strategic plan

(TNC): Become a partner in our Port Royal Sound conservation initiative

7. Do you have suggestions regarding how to create more opportunities for various organizations to submit potential land acquisition projects?

Answers:

(Anon1): Create an application process

(Anon2): Promote the RCLP website and link to other partner websites; publish the application and review process

(TNC): Allow all qualified land trusts to apply for funding for projects

8. Do you have suggestions on how the Rural & Critical Land Preservation Program land acquisition review, discussion and approval process can be more transparent so the public has the necessary, non-contractual related information regarding a potential project?

Answers:

(Anon1): Provide the name of the property or parcel number on the meeting agendas instead of just a number; discuss the project in open session to the extent possible

(Anon2): See #7 answer

(TNC): No answer given



9. SPECIFICALLY FOR BEAUFORT COUNTY CITIZENS:

How can the Rural & Critical Program more effectively align with what you believe to be the expectations of the community?

Answers:

(Anon1): Do more community surveys to determine expectations; hold public workshops during the Greenprint updating process

(Anon2): Create improved awareness and understanding of the Program actions and benefits through multiple media promotions

(TNC): No answer given

10. SPECIFICALLY FOR PROJECT PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS:

How can the Rural & Critical Program more effectively support your organization's land preservation goals and mission?

Answers:

(Anon1): Remember that citizens are stakeholders too

(Anon2): N/A

(TNC): Our goal is to see the right land gets protected for people and nature; use the best science to site conservation projects; raise the capacity of local groups to get more conservation done

11. Do you have additional comments regarding the Program?

Answers:

(Anon1): Program should integrate discussions about updating the Greenprint, the plan for a sunset, pros and cons of continued acquisitions from county departments such as Economic Development (i.e. impacts to economic growth), Planning (i.e. impacts to future development and where conservation is not appropriate), and Stormwater (i.e. flooding and sea level rise impacts affecting communities).



(Anon2): No answer given

(TNC): Future health of the region is going to require Jasper County to get on board with conservation.



February 14, 2019

Rural and Critical Lands Board
PO Drawer 1228,
Beaufort, SC 29901

Re: Community Development Department solicitation of public comments

Chairman Matthews and board:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today. Broadly, we'd like to discuss our philosophy of why land conservation is so important to future land use and regional health, why specific public financing programs like the Rural and Critical Lands Program are important to the region, and thoughts on improvements to the program regarding policies, procedures, transparency and evaluation criteria. We will follow up with complete answers to the questionnaire and a written letter.

The significance of landscape-scale conservation:

First, It is important to put this program in context: why has this successful program been supported by voters five times and counting? Land conservation is a critical tool for managing growth, protecting water quality and enhancing the quality of life. This comes not from small parcels alone but large swaths of protected land that offer corridors for wildlife, absorption of stormwater and working rural landscapes.

A sustainable future for our region will largely depend on the conservation community's ability to align the interests of many county and municipal leaders, economic development leaders, education leaders and others to support permanent land protection and conservation financing region-wide. Development patterns and land conversion have a significant impact on the Port Royal Sound region as a whole, the fishery economy, the resilience of the community to sea level rise and flooding and conservation value.

The Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands program, begun out of a recommendation in the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, is one such tool for increasing land protection in the region. With this program, the community can leverage public dollars to protect keystone rural parcels that would halt the march of encroaching development and thereby protect productive wetland systems, wildlife habitat and working farms, forming a vibrant rural greenbelt around the county.

Quality of life benefits from land protection include healthy fisheries, improved or stable water quality, traffic mitigation, natural resilience to floods and storm surges, ability for marsh migration in river corridors, preservation of farm and timber land and their economic value, preservation of rural way of life including hunting and fishing, access to water and waterways by the public.

The Coastal Conservation League is a long-time supporter of the program. We've supported the program directly by working on the 1999 Comprehensive Plan and supporting advocacy campaigns to get out the vote for referendums. We've also worked indirectly to support the program, by participating extensively on land use plans to protect rural land uses and prevent inappropriate development. In this vein, land conservation and specifically Rural and Critical lands acquisition should be a complement to existing land uses and not just a bail-out for developers. Land conservation, land use and transportation planning are three legs of the stool for a vibrant landscape.

How can we build on this programs' benefits and success?

We believe the RCLP process can be improved to better meet the goals of the program for future "rural" and "critical" protections. At a minimum, the following amendments are necessary:

- Expand eligible applicants to include land trusts, municipalities, and counties working in coordination with Beaufort County Open Land Trust
- Create an application process or public quarterly project review that will allow for meaningful competition and transparency among qualified projects,
- Improve valuation criteria, emphasizing financial leverage and regional benefit
- Suggest a greater funding priority on protecting rural lands via conservation easement or purchase of development rights,
- Improve RCLP Board Configuration, continuing to attract board members with backgrounds in estate law, finance, rural land ownership, agriculture or conservation rather than only focusing on district addresses

Expand eligible applicants where project selection is done in consultation with Beaufort County Open Land Trust but open to qualified applicants including land trusts, municipalities and counties. This allows for municipalities and other land trusts to work together with Beaufort County and the Beaufort County Open Land Trust and secure land protection. This has been done well in the past but policies and procedures may need to be amended to facilitate this collaboration.

Create a public application process or quarterly project review. This process should take place in public session. This could take several forms but the intent is to provide a transparent, competitive, and efficient process so that strategic parcels can continue to be protected with easements at the fairest cost to taxpayers. This also ensures the public's awareness of the potential for land protection, and likely a cadre of enthusiastic supporters.

An application process or regular review periods gives staff and board members an opportunity to review projects in groups rather than isolation. The approved valuation criteria become even more valuable because they are used to compare conservation and critical value of each projects. This process provides an avenue for projects to emerge and be evaluated by their own merit against program goals and others projects in the application group. In a county where many parcels are beautiful, rich in natural resources, and of interest for preservation, comparison of projects creates opportunity for fair evaluation and ideally should allow the best, more important project to move forward and earn funding.

This process could also give municipalities and other land trusts an opportunity to apply for funds or pursue land protection.

Systematic project review also allows for a public hearing with some information able to be shared publicly, which has generally been very meaningful to voters/supporters. Overall, this could result in even broader support for a popular program. The recent public engagement on Whitehall project proves the public is interested in, excited about, and deserves to know about land conservation purchases in the pipeline.

Improving criteria to emphasis partnerships and funding: All projects should be highly-leveraged: Funding sources could include Rural and Critical Lands program dollars, landowner donation via bargain sale easement, private foundation dollars, private fundraising, federal and state grants, among others. We are increasingly sensitive to over-reliance on Rural and Critical Lands dollars as the sole source for land protection money. Projects should reflect a diversified funding strategy so that more land can be protected per dollar spent. This also enables the program to be closer in line with the price per acre spent by the State Conservation Bank and other conservation funding. Establishing a precedent with a high price per acre creates a standard that other counties can't meet. This may result in reluctance among neighboring properties in other jurisdictions like Jasper County to protect their land unless they can receive the price the Beaufort pays.

An emphasis on easements in the rural areas: Buying development rights on rural land, rather than fee simple, is a smart strategy; it staves off development, keeps land on the tax rolls, encourages traditional rural uses like farming and forestry, protects water quality and wildlife habitat, protects our air base, and does all of this for pennies on the dollar.

Per the referendum, up to 20% of the funds can be used for passive park infrastructure. The existing County passive parks inventory is large (at ~11,500 acres) and the allocated 20% is essential for trails, gravel parking lots, signage, and to accomplish the many goals of the County's Passive Parks plan. Therefore, the priority for the remaining funds should be conservation easements and the purchase of development rights rather than fee simple acquisition. Fee simply acquisition adds to the future Passive Parks inventory, adds to county ownership and maintenance costs and is an expensive way to protect land.

Continued Improved board configuration with preference given to board members that represent various interests, rather than just county regions. This should maintain 1 board member appointed by each council member but encourage backgrounds related to land conservation interests, finance, real estate, rural land ownership, agriculture, fishing, or estate law. These are common qualifiers found in similar programs and could give council a better guideline for appropriate board members. This configuration is also similar to what is required for other boards (e.g. Design Review Board, an architect must serve on the board).

Scoring Criteria should reflect the goals of the program.

The program is especially important for *the rural areas*, where working farms, forest, protected air space and family lands abound. *The program is critical for the urban edges, where inappropriate growth threatens to change this rural landscape.* Binden Plantation and the Mobley tract are prime examples of protected properties that were once threatened by

inappropriate development. Protecting natural resources, including prime soils, and evaluating the threat of development should be weighted heavily in the scoring rubric.

We also believe the project must be highly leveraged via a public/private partnership and based on a justifiable price per acre valuation, and those metrics should be weighted heavily in the scoring rubric.

In general, we emphasize natural resource protection, attention to development pressures and future land conversion, protection of rural farmland, the ability to leverage additional financial support of the given property, and ability for the property to meet the needs of the Greenprint and add to the regional greenbelt and protected landscape. In our response to the questionnaire, we will elaborate on the scoring criteria in more detail.

Conclusion:

Additional transparency can only help the widely successful program. Through coordinated and collaborative investments, over 1.2 million acres have been protected on the South Carolina coast. Locally, we have great stories to tell from past successes and future opportunities. Binden, Lemon Island, Henry Farms, New Riverside and others are all great stories of land protection in strategic places that have benefitted us as a region. We have more work to do in these strategic rural corridors of incredible landscapes along Sheldon Church Road, the New River, Okatie Highway and on St Helena.

We look forward to future participation in the Greenprint process and in support of the program.

With thanks,

Kate Schaefer
Director of Programs
Coastal Conservation League

BEAUFORT COUNTY RURAL AND CRITICAL LANDS PRESERVATION BOARD

The Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Board (hereafter known as the Board) meeting was held Thursday, February 14, 2019, at the Beaufort Jasper Water and Sewer Authority Conference Room, 3:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Mike Mathews (Chairman)
Mr. Bob Bender
Mr. Terry Hill
Mr. Beekman Webb
Mr. Walter Mack

Ms. Gail O’Kane
Ms. Dorothy Scanlin
Mr. Richard Walls (Vice Chairman)
Mr. Douglas Koop

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

STAFF PRESENT:

Mr. Eric Greenway, Beaufort County Community Development Director
Ms. Amanda Flake, Beaufort County Natural Resources Planner
Ms. Barbara Holmes, Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Ms. Diane McMaster, Beaufort County Community Development Admin Assistant

GUESTS PRESENT:

Ms. Stefanie Nagid, Beaufort County Passive Parks Manager
Ms. Melissa Peagler, Beaufort County Long Range Planner
Ms. Alice Howard, Beaufort County Council
Mr. Chris Inglese, Beaufort County Staff Attorney
Mr. Ed Pappas, Beaufort County Planning Commission
Ms. Jennifer Combs, City of Hardeeville
Ms. Neil Parsons, City of Hardeeville
Ms. Kate Schaefer, Coastal Conservation League
Ms. Kristin Williams, Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Ms. Rikki Parker, Coastal Conservation League
Mr. Chuck Newton, Sea Island Corridor Coalition
Mr. Wayne Smith
Mr. Dean Moss
Ms. Wendy Zara
Ms. Jessie White
Mr. Robert Sample

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

Chairman Mike Mathews called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. He noted there were six (6) R&C Board members up for reappointment in 2019. All members received reappointments (Bender, Hill, Webb, Mathews, O’Kane, Scanlin).

Ms. Barbara Holmes informed everyone regarding a presentation occurring February 25, 2019, 9:00 a.m., Port Royal Sound Maritime Center - watershed mapping effort/water preservation.

REVIEW OF AGENDA

Chairman Mathews asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. Ms. Stefanie Nagid requested one additional item be added to the Agenda regarding a possible land donation to Beaufort County. Ms. Gail O’Kane made a motion to approve the Agenda as presented, noting the one requested addition, and Mr. Richard Walls seconded the motion. **The motion carried unanimously** (FOR: Mathews, Bender, Hill, Webb, Mack, O’Kane, Scanlin, Walls, Koop).

CITIZEN COMMENTS There were none.

REVIEW OF MINUTES

Chairman Mathews asked if there were any additional changes to the amended Minutes from the August 9, 2018, Board meeting. Hearing none, Ms. Gail O’Kane made a motion to accept the minutes as amended, and Mr. Richard Walls seconded the motion. **The motion carried** (FOR: Mathews, Bender, Hill, Mack, O’Kane, Scanlin, Walls, Koop and ONE ABSTAINED: Webb).

Chairman Mathews asked if there were any changes to the Minutes from the January 10, 2019, Board meeting. Hearing none, Mr. Richard Walls made a motion to accept the minutes as written, and Mr. Walter Mack seconded the motion. **The motion carried unanimously** (FOR: Mathews, Bender, Hill, Webb, Mack, O’Kane, Scanlin, Walls, Koop).

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN 2019

Chairman Mathews requested nominations for R&C Chairman and Vice Chairman for 2019. Mr. Richard Walls nominated Mr. Mike Mathews for Chairman. There was unanimous support for Mr. Mathews as Chairman. Ms. Gail O’Kane nominated Mr. Richard Walls for Vice Chairman, and he shared concern due to family commitments in 2019. Therefore, Mr. Richard Walls nominated Mr. Beekman Webb for Vice Chairman, and there was sufficient support for Mr. Webb’s nomination.

REGULAR MEETING

Chairman Mathews discussed the Board’s efforts to update the Greenprint in 2019. This will require input from many sources and requires a review of the Board’s evaluation processes and ranking criteria. An 11-question Public Input Questionnaire has been circulated in an attempt to acquire suggestions and opinions from members of the public and our stakeholders / partners.

Mr. Eric Greenway, Community Development Director, emphasized the importance of transparency during all decision making processes and stated that recommendations/feedback

from all input and the recent Land Preservation Project Criteria and Program Process Questionnaire would be presented at the Board's Retreat scheduled for Friday, March 8, 2019, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., Bluffton Library.

PUBLIC INPUT SESSION

Mr. Ed Pappas, Beaufort County Planning Commission, stated that he did submit a completed Questionnaire and wanted to touch on four areas of importance before the Board today: improving the property selection process; creating a better public understanding for land preservation and economic benefits; leveraging funds through partnerships; and developing a solid strategic plan.

Mr. Chuck Newton, Sea Island Corridor Coalition, stressed the importance of transparency and effective communication regarding growth and development decisions. He also stated that the public supported the recent Bond Referendum for land preservation/protection purposes, not general revenue funding.

Ms. Wendy Zara feels the public is willing to spend money specifically earmarked for land protection. The property ranking process needs to be more objective, and the public should have a better understanding of this process. She also commented that all fee simple property should have a conservation easement.

Mr. Robert Sample expressed his desire for more diversity in the R&C Board, BCOLT Board, other local organizations, and outreach programs. He questioned the legality of properties acquired with R&C funds supporting office space.

Ms. Kate Schaefer, Director of Programs Coastal Conservation League, stated that ongoing land conservation is a critical tool for managing growth, protecting water quality, and enhancing quality of life. This organized protection also extends to our wetland systems, wildlife habitat, and the rural greenbelt. She also gave suggestions for program improvement: expand eligible applicants working in coordination with BCOLT; create an application process that allows for competition and transparency; improve valuation criteria; suggest a greater funding priority on protecting rural lands via conservation easement or purchase of development rights; and improve Board configuration with focus on background rather than district address.

ROBERT'S RULES AND MEETING PROCEDURES

Mr. Chris Inglese, Beaufort County Staff Attorney, discussed basic meeting protocol and provided a summary sheet addressing the most common meeting procedures. He commented on the following FOIA guidelines: publication of meeting agenda; notice of meeting via media outlet; meeting open to the public; and importance of conducting business only after notice, not at an informal gathering.

The use of motions during a meeting can help ensure productivity, civility, and structure. An amendment to an existing agenda is voted on separately and requires a 2/3 vote. Approval of the agenda as written requires a majority vote.

Executive Session - A motion is required to begin an Executive Session. It is used to discuss contractual negotiations or the proposed sale of property and otherwise, carries a narrow scope for discussion in general. No voting or expression of opinions amongst board members is allowed during Executive Session. Accurate wording is important when listing the Executive Session on the applicable meeting agenda. No motion is required to end an Executive Session. The appointed secretary reports the group out of Session at a particular time. The group is then free to make a motion voting on the matter discussed during Session.

2019 R&C BOARD RETREAT

Consideration of proposed changes to the Ranking Sheets' criteria will be the key objective during the Retreat. It was noted that all recommendations being considered will undergo legal review prior to acceptance by the Board. Board members were encouraged to review R&C policies and procedures, Ordinance, Greenprint summary, and ranking sheet criteria prior to the Retreat.

HAMPTON LAKE PROPERTY DONATION

Ms. Stefanie Nagid reported on a proposed property donation from Sandlapper, LLC. The 53.4 acre tract is located near Hampton Lake in Bluffton and is slated for development by the County as an active park.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Chairman Mathews entertained a motion at 4:35 p.m.; seconded by Ms. Dorothy Scanlin, to adjourn the meeting. **The motion was approved unanimously** (FOR: Mathews, Bender, Hill, Webb, Mack, O'Kane, Scanlin, Walls, Koop).

Submitted by: Diane McMaster, Beaufort County Community Development
Senior Administrative Specialist

Approved: _____
Mike Mathews, Chairman,
Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Board

Date: _____