

BEAUFORT COUNTY RURAL AND CRITICAL LAND PRESERVATION BOARD

The annual retreat of the Beaufort County Rural and Critical Land Preservation Board (hereafter known as the Board) was held on March 10, 2011, at the Palmetto Bluff Conservancy Room in Bluffton, SC, at 10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Malcolm Goodridge (Chairman)
Mr. Ed Pappas (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. York Glover
Mr. George Johnston
Mr. Jacob Preston
Mr. Steve Riley
Mr. Ray Tudor
Mr. Joseph Vercellotti

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ms. Selena Brown
Mr. Pete Dawson
Ms. Janice Johnson

STAFF PRESENT:

Mr. Tony Criscitiello, Planning Director
Ms. Amanda Flake, Natural Resources Planner
Ms. Billie Lindsay, Planner
Ms. Linda Maietta, Planning Assistant
Ms. Ann Bluntzer, Mr. Garrett Budds, Beaufort County Open Land Trust (BCOLT)
Mr. Ken Driggers, Open Land Trust Consultant

GUESTS PRESENT:

Mr. Brian Flewelling, County Council
Ms. Laura Von Harten, County Council
Mr. Paul Sommerville, County Council
Mr. Bob Moquin, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Gary Moore, Adventure Center
Mr. Jack Moore, Adventure Center
Mr. Kyle Peterson, Beaufort Gazette

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Malcolm Goodridge called the meeting to order at approximately 10:30 a.m. and thanked everyone for coming. Chairman Goodridge announced the following Board members have been reappointed by the Beaufort County Council to serve on the Board:

- Ms. Selena Brown
- Mr. Ed Pappas
- Mr. Jacob Preston
- Mr. Steve Riley
- Mr. Joseph Vercellotti
- Mr. Malcolm Goodridge

Congratulations to all!

Chairman Goodridge asked for introductions by all present at the meeting. Chairman Goodridge turned the meeting over to Ms. Ann Bluntzer and Mr. Garrett Budds.

Mr. Budds welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief agenda review of the program for today. Ms. Bluntzer thanked the members of County Council for attending and being available to provide their comments on the direction of this program. The BCOLT opened the meeting with a power point presentation outlining the history of the program and the program's role: past, present and future. This included:

- Land Protection History
- Partnerships
- Environmental Urgency – Current Environmental Data
- Ecosystem Functions
- Ecosystem Services
- Ecosystem Valuation
- Protecting Our Ecosystems
- Regional Approach
- Stewardship

After some discussion, the group transitioned into **Session One, Planning the Balance of the Bond**. Ms. Bluntzer and Mr. Budds led a discussion regarding short- and long-term implications of land acquisition and spending the remaining balance from the 2006 bond (approximately \$15 million). An outline of the presentation follows:

1. Environmental Urgency
 - Current Environmental Data
2. Strategic Urgency
 - Future acquisitions will highlight the program's mission and approach
 - Acquisitions will tell the program's story and outline its next chapter
3. Institutional Urgency
 - What swings in the balance?
 - Successful and highly regarded public program
 - Legacy of land conservation – a regional and national model

Maps of northern and southern Beaufort County were given to the group. Maps were noted with such factors as to which waterways have been impaired, what the public agreed was worth protecting and what this program has purchased. The other reference point is the green print from 2006. The group was asked to note their thoughts on the maps as to what the next steps should be. This exercise is the first step toward developing the green print to move forward with the next bond referendum.

At approximately 11:45, the group broke for lunch. Chairman Goodridge called the meeting back to order at approximately 12:35 p.m.

Session Two: Opening Property to the Public

The afternoon session started with Mr. Ken Driggers, the consultant for BCOLT. Mr. Driggers wanted to put in perspective public access plans on properties acquired. Public access to these properties will become more serious as there is less money in these programs during difficult budget times. Four issues that need to be given some thought:

1. Clarify the management responsibilities for the properties
2. Outline management policies based upon the sensitivity of each resource
3. Schedule property management that allows the County to both care for the property and protect the resource
4. Structure the request for landowner donated funds and develop policies for donated fund management

As the Board approaches a new bond issue, this question needs to be thought of in a strategic fashion because the County can't promise how much more land can be protected because that's economic based, but the County can promise that taxpayers will be allowed to access some of these great properties that have already been bought. This is a key piece in trying to build up support for the bond issue. Mr. Driggers turned the discussion over to Mr. Tony Criscitiello.

Mr. Criscitiello spoke to the role of the Planning Department. The Planning Department is staff to this Board but also functions as line staff in terms of actually doing things that relate to the functions of the County government. This program is a classic example of that. While the Planning staff is involved in planning, they're also involved in trying to make things happen. It was alluded to that there were funds given that amounted to \$1.6 million (gift monies) of which approximately \$450,000 were undesignated funds. Being undesignated means the funds could be applied to any property that has been acquired through the RCLP park development. By default, the Planning Department has taken on more responsibility for doing things than is typical of a Planning Department. The Planning Department is functioning in the Parks and Leisure Service (PALS) capacity. The function of the County government is changing as a result of the mission changing. It begs the questions – what is the role of the Planning Department going forward? What is the role of PALS going forward? Do we need a recreation plan for Beaufort County? Obviously, we do. In the short term, the Planning Department has to respond to the situation at hand in regard to parks that we've acquired and making them into useful, passive parks.

Mr. Criscitiello noted that his task and responsibility, with the staff's help, is to focus on areas where partnerships can be identified, public/private partnerships. The Planning Department needs to be prepared to go to County Council with a park proposal, ensuring all the bases are covered. Mr. Criscitiello will soon be going to County Council with a plan for Fort Fremont, Crystal Lake, Widgeon Point, and Okatie Preserve. These are done because Mr. Criscitiello had an opportunity to identify public/private partnerships that solves the other half of the equation – who's going to maintain and operate County parks.

Mr. Criscitiello introduced Mr. Bob Moquin, Executive Director of the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Criscitiello approached Mr. Moquin to see how the County can capitalize on what the Chamber of Commerce does in regard to bringing people to Beaufort County, to the parks to experience them, and perhaps find a way that such circumstances can lead to a revenue source that the County can apply to the maintenance and operation of the parks.

Mr. Criscitiello also introduced Messrs. Gary and Jack Moore from Adventure Center. These two gentlemen have an opportunity to assist the County with Okatie Preserve. The County has the money to develop Okatie Preserve and these two gentlemen could participate in the operation and maintenance of that park.

Mr. Criscitiello is also developing a set of plans for Widgeon Point with the assistance of a local architect so the County can begin the process of Phase II and bring this park on line. His strategic plan is to try to provide venues both north and south of the Broad that will lead to a growing level of credibility in the minds of the public that what the County has acquired has true value, is an asset that people can see, enjoy and use.

Mr. Criscitiello gave the floor over to Mr. Gary Moore.

Mr. Moore provided background information on the Adventure Center program. The fundamental charter of this organization is education. This is a non-profit corporation, 501 3c. Mr. Moore's plans include using the park for canopy tours which would generate revenue to keep the other educational programs running. In addition, his corporation would be maintaining the park. Mr. Moore would be approaching local schools to offer programs for education. The possibility of this proposal was discussed and questions were addressed.

Mr. Driggers stated that before the County starts dealing with these properties on an "as proposed" basis, some thought should be given to the broad themes of what should be done with the properties that have been protected from a conservation ecological perspective. And the other question is whether the County wants to commercialize its preserve. Mr. Driggers strongly suggests that a classification system of properties is needed. He recommended the following classifications:

1. Sensitive use; public access/public use not recommended
2. Limited passive recreational use is allowable (i.e., research)
3. Some type of scheduled public use is allowable (i.e., events)
4. Available for public recreation

Discussion ensued including is it the responsibility of this Board to tell the County what to do with the property purchased, taking advantage of opportunities as they are presented, Parks and Leisure Services (PALS) involvement, referring back to the Charter of the Board for role of the Board, intent when property purchased, not putting

everything on hold until a perfect plan is presented, possibility properties will fit into two classifications, get some parks open to show off for 2012 public referendum, progress being made.

Mr. Bob Moquin took the floor. The example of Mr. Criscitiello reaching out to his organization speaks to exactly what you're talking about today. Mr. Moquin made two observations: 1) by taking an inventory of parks and defining their uses will help Beaufort County identify partners. Beaufort County cannot operate under status quo. There needs to be an understanding of which properties to promote. 2) The other challenge is how to maintain these properties.

Mr. Moquin told the group about a study they had done in January last year to determine what draws visitors to South Carolina. The top three attributes were: outdoor recreation, history, and arts. Outdoors is one of the key draws. So whatever Beaufort County can do to protect and manage our natural resources will feed tourism. Mr. Moquin also told the group about an upcoming conference coming to Hilton Head. The International Society of Eco and Sustainable Tourism, will be meeting on September 19, 2011. There will be approximately 500 people attending this conference. These people are very passionate about what is being talked about here today. This group also has a lot of influence on tourism and where people are promoting. Mr. Criscitiello suggested that the BCOLT could work with the Planning Department for a presentation and tours of the area. This sounds like an excellent opportunity for Beaufort County.

Mr. Driggers also provided additional information to consider. He represents Richland County and they are moving very quickly into what could be the future of conservation. Richland County started a very aggressive mitigation program, spending their conservation money to buy property and then sell mitigation credits off it. Beaufort County currently owns approximately 10,000 acres which could probably throw off \$4/\$5 million of mitigation money and also another \$2/3 million in carbon credits. That's a possible \$10 million that could be generated simply by taking County-owned property and executing a conservation easement on that property and doing some restoration. That is the future of conservation. This should be considered very definitely right now. It's enough money to run your access maintenance program.

Mr. Criscitiello, addressing Chairman Goodridge, asked to make a suggestion to the Board. Mr. Criscitiello requests the Board support the idea of pursuing at least four implementation measures of the RCLP and start providing real venues and projects in Beaufort County. Mr. Criscitiello identified these four as being: Widgeon Point, Fort Fremont, Crystal Lake, and Okatie Preserve. With the consent of the Board, Mr. Criscitiello will continue his efforts. Mr. Criscitiello believes he could have something major done by the end of 2011. Ms. Bluntzer asked if she could add that a preliminary recreation plan for the remaining properties be drafted in the next three months. Mr. Criscitiello thought having policy would be more in line with what could be done in three months. The Board agreed to this suggestion and told Mr. Criscitiello to move forward.

A five-minute stretch break was called.

Session Three – Looking to the Future – 2012 Bond Referendum

Mr. Driggers introduced this part of the session by saying that the steps taken as a Board, as an organization, need to be oriented to helping the process of getting more money. Everyone agreed. There are five elements of a successful bond issue:

1. Administrative - make crucial decisions toward a bond issue
2. Celebrate success – On-going story of the projects protected through the RCLP
3. Define the threat – this is two-fold: the threat to the resources from development and the dual threat of the program running out of money
4. Plan the pitch - this involves putting the appeal for a new bond issue together, along with a citizen's committee and speaker's program
5. Execute – get the voters to vote for it again

The Board needs to outline what we're going to do and who these tasks can be assigned to. Are there other avenues we could explore, rather than just a bond referendum, to get funding such as millage or partnerships? Chairman Goodridge stated that right now the Board will focus on the bond issue and look at other alternatives later. The process has to be done and on the ballot by June 2012. This timeframe also goes for the PR issues also. Whoever is championing the issue will need plenty of time because public funds cannot be used.

In 2012, there may be competing referendums for a wide variety of issues. Our bond issue may come in conflict with other issues. Mr. George Johnston made the suggestion that a sub-committee be formed to come up with wording for the bond referendum. Chairman Goodridge also solicited help from Mr. Jacob Preston for the sub-committee. These Board members would work with Mr. Driggers and Mr. Budds. Mr. Johnston will chair the sub-committee. The Board should be prepared to give County Council ideas of language and choices - management access, structure of it – as well as other possible funding sources: sales tax, team up with CIP projects, team up with education program.

Mr. Driggers noted that nationally speaking, open space referendums have the highest percentage of passing than any other type of referendum put on the ballot. It was pointed out that if the Board is only going to put the purchase of land on the ballot then the wording is already available from the last bond referendum.

The Board agreed that the RCLP needs more money. The County, not the Board should determine how (bond referendum, sales tax, etc.). It is also up to the County to determine funding sources for the operational needs of each property.

Chairman Goodridge confirmed that the sub-committee will bring draft wording for a bond referendum back to the Board for review at the next meeting.

Mr. Driggers moved on to address the matter of public relations. The Board agreed that now is the time to start this effort. He asked the Board for suggestions. These included:

- Taking the first part of the BCOLT presentation from today and making it into a slide show. Each member of the Board could then use their email contacts and send it out. Also include maps from today noting environmental threats.

- Website of accomplishments (Ms. Bluntzer noted that the Beaufort County website page for RCLP is dead. Ms. Flake will follow-up with staff responsible)
- Get the public involved by redoing the green print. (Ms. Bluntzer stated that they have applied for a grant to fund this process. The grant should be awarded this summer)
- Coordinate efforts with Friends of the Rivers
- Speaking engagements – Board members are willing and available

A brief discussion was held regarding the threat to our resources. It was suggested that we need to “quantify” this threat with an economic number. Mr. Budds commented that an economic ecologist is needed to get this done. Ms. Bluntzer stated that BCOLT will try to find a way to get a study done asap. It was also stated that the environmental argument is a strong one but it’s also an investment in economic development.

Mr. Driggers moved onto getting the campaign together and when it happens. The goal should be to have a committee up and running by the end of the year. Councilman Flewelling cautioned the Board and asked them to step back until the County’s legal counsel is contacted. Putting a referendum on the ballot is certainly under the Board’s purview but advocating it should only be done as “individuals,” not Board members until legal counsel is obtained. BCOLT is fine to proceed; it is a private organization. Ms. Bluntzer noted that BCOLT will look into getting the Citizens of Open Land Space Committee together.

Chairman Goodridge left the meeting at approximately 2:45 p.m. Vice Chair Ed Pappas took control of the meeting. Vice Chair Pappas asked if there were any changes to the minutes from the February 10, 2011, Board meeting. Mr. Tudor made a motion to accept the minutes with one correction: to change the meeting location to the BJWSA conference room. Mr. Vercellotti seconded the motion to accept the minutes from the February 10, 2011, Board meeting, with correction. The motion was carried unanimously (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

The Board took a ten-minute break at approximately 2:50 p.m. The meeting reconvened at approximately 3:00 p.m.

Vice Chairman Pappas entertained a motion by Mr. Riley, seconded by Mr. Tudor, to adjourn the Open Session at 3:00 p.m. and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing matters associated with property acquisition. The vote was unanimous to enter into Executive Session (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

The Board re-entered Open Session at approximately 3:35 p.m.

The following is to be presented to the Natural Resources Committee:

Mr. Vercellotti made a motion; seconded by Mr. Johnston, to recommend to the Natural Resources Committee of County Council to pursue Parcel C1 under the terms and

conditions recommended by BCOLT, as discussed in Executive Session. The motion was carried unanimously (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

Mr. Riley made a motion; seconded by Mr. Vercellotti, to recommend to the Natural Resources Committee of County Council to pursue Parcel HS1 under the terms and conditions recommended by BCOLT, as discussed in Executive Session. The motion was carried unanimously (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

Mr. Riley made a motion; seconded by Mr. Tudor, to recommend to the Natural Resources Committee of County Council to pursue Parcel H2 under the terms and conditions recommended by BCOLT, as discussed in Executive Session. The motion was carried unanimously (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Vice Chairman Pappas entertained a motion at approximately 3:45 p.m. from Mr. Joe Vercellotti, seconded by Mr. Tudor, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was carried unanimously (FOR: Pappas, Preston, Riley, Tudor, Vercellotti, Glover, Johnston).

Submitted by: Linda Maietta, Beaufort County Planning Assistant

Approved:

Malcolm Goodridge, Chairman, Beaufort County Rural and Critical
Land Preservation Board

Date: _____