

MINUTES
RURAL AND CRITICAL LAND PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING

December 8, 2022

Crystal Lake Park/Zoom

The electronic and print media duly notified in
accordance with the State Freedom of Information Act.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chairman Walter Mack, Vice-Chairman Art Baer, Mac Bennett, John Maffei, Stodd McEwan, Tom Murray, Beek Webb

Absent: Ford Bartholow, Kenneth Frazier, Gail O’Kane

County Council: Alice Howard, York Glover

Staff: Amanda Flake, Natural Resources Planner

Visitors: Kate Schaefer, BCOLT Director of Land Protection; Brittany Ward, BC Attorney; Stefanie Nagid, Passive Parks Manager; Chuck Atkinson, BC Assistant County Administrator; Rob Merchant, BC Planning Director; Mark Davis, BC Assistant Planning Director; Amanda Dickman, BC Library Director; Jessie White, Coastal Conservation League; Sebastian Lee, Island Packet; Tony Kukulich, Post and Courier; Joe Mac; Beaufort Trailblazers; Paula Smith, citizen

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Walter Mack called the meeting to order at 2:37 p.m.

Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Murray, seconded by Vice-Chairman Baer to approve the agenda. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 6, 2022

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Webb seconded by Mr. Bennett to approve the minutes as presented. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Mr. Joe Mac with Beaufort Trailblazers stated that he was glad to see new members on the R&C Board and that his group is still advocating for building bike trails on parks within Beaufort County.

Ms. Jessie White with Coastal Conservation League stated that the League was excited that the Greenspace Sales Tax passed and is willing to help where needed. In reference to the land swap item, she stated that the CCL is in favor of libraries and active ball fields but any transfer of R&C property needs to be properly studied to determine if the integrity of the R&C Program is still being upheld. Beaufort County staff and the Board also need to determine if the properties to be traded meet the requirements of the R&C Program. There also needs to be an assessment of stormwater impact if this property is developed.

Ms. Paula Smith stated that she is a resident of Sun City and agrees that there is a need for libraries and ball fields but that this R&C property was protected from being developed because it is a part of the Okatie headwaters. It was also bought for stormwater purposes and if it is now developed it might negatively impact the stormwater ponds that have already been installed on the property. Her opinion is that the County needs to leave space for wildlife and not swap the properties.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

November Field Trip Recap

To continue educating the R&C Board members about the properties staff has begun taking the R&C Board members on fields trips of R&C properties. On November 17th the Board visited Okatie Regional Preserve. The staff and Board walked the property and observed an amazing grove of white oaks as well as maritime forest. Ms. Stefanie Nagid, the Passive Parks Manager, and Mr. Michael Murphy, a local arborist, are submitting a proposal to have this property incorporated into the Old Growth Forest Network. Members of the County Broadcasting Department joined the field trip and will produce a video to promote the property and the R&C Program.

Greenspace Sales Tax Update

Ms. Schaefer stated that the Greenspace sales tax referendum passed by 53% vote. As part of this referendum there will be a board appointed that is separate and distinct from the R&C Board. More clarity on the process of this program and board will come in early 2023.

2023 R&C Board Calendar and Board Recognition

Ms. Amanda Flake passed out the 2023 calendar for R&C Board meetings which will occur on the second Thursday of each month at 2:30 pm at Crystal Lake. Ms. Schaefer stated that Ms. Gail O’Kane will be rotating off the R&C Board in February 2023. She has a great passion for the outdoors and has been very vocal about historic Mitchellville. Her service on this Board has been much appreciated and she will be missed.

New Leaf/Evergreen Land Swap Project

Mr. Chuck Atkinson, Beaufort County Assistant County Administrator, presented a proposed idea to trade some property within the R&C Program with property not currently in the program. There were some studies done that showed the need for a library and active ball fields near the Okatie area of the county. With this proposal Mr. Atkinson is trying to provide the best service to the public. The proposal would include taking 6 acres at the top of the Evergreen tract for a library and 40 acres at the bottom of the New Leaf tract for ball fields. These two pieces would be traded for Camp St. Mary’s (8 acres on the water) and a 10 acre piece of property off of Bluffton Parkway. The middle piece of the New Leaf tract that contains the wetlands that filter to the headwaters of the Okatie River will remain protected. Ms. Nagid, the Passive Parks Manager, made statements in support of the swap since it still accomplishes protecting the headwaters of the Okatie River as well as addressing stormwater needs in this area. After some discussion it was decided to table the decision until the Board meeting in January 2023. The R&C Board would like to visit all the properties and have staff evaluate the two new properties before a decision is made. A site visit to the properties will be coordinated in December 2022.

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Bennett seconded by Mr. McEwan to evaluate the two new properties for R&C funding and provide R&C Board members the opportunity to visit the sites in December. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Motion: It was moved by Vice-Chairman Baer, seconded by Mr. Webb to adjourn the meeting at 3:45 pm. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Submitted by: Amanda Flake, Beaufort County Community Development
Natural Resources Planner

Approved: _____
Walter Mack, Chairman
Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Board

Date: _____