

MINUTES
RURAL AND CRITICAL LAND PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING

January 12, 2023

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, Ford Bartholow, Kenneth Frazier, John Maffei, Stodd McEwan, Tom Murray, Lucia O'Farrell, Beek Webb

Absent: Mac Bennett, Gail O'Kane

County
Council: Alice Howard, York Glover, Paula Brown, Tab Tabernik

Staff: Amanda Flake, Natural Resources Planner

Visitors: Kate Schaefer, BCOLT Director of Land Protection; Kristin Williams, BCOLT Executive Director; Stefanie Nagid, Passive Parks Manager; Chuck Atkinson, BC Assistant County Administrator; Rob Merchant, BC Planning Director; Kristen Forbus, BC Long Range Planner; Amanda Dickman, BC Library Director; Katie Herrera, BC Stormwater; Jessie White, Coastal Conservation League; Grant McClure, Coastal Conservation League; Sebastian Lee, Island Packet; Joe Mac; Beaufort Trailblazers; Paula Smith, citizen; Don Timms, citizen; Debbie Barton, citizen; Julie Mathews, citizen; Nancy York, citizen; Lynn Greeley, citizen; Raymond Dominick, citizen; Suzanne Larson, citizen; Amy McNeal, citizen; Bennett McNeal, citizen

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Walter Mack called the meeting to order at 2:32 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 Vice-Chairman Baer, seconded by Mr. Maffei to approve the agenda. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O'Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 8, 2022

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

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Ms. Julie Mathews read a statement from her friend, Caroline Rayo, for the R&C Board to reconsider spending money on the library and ballfields since the Bluffton library recently had renovations and there are already enough ballfields in this area.

Ms. Debbie Barton, a Sun City resident, witnessed trees being removed to widen highway 170. She stated that another library nor ballfields were warranted in this area. She would not like to see any more tree removal and was not in favor of the land swap.

Ms. Nancy York and Ms. Lynn Greeley stated that they were not in favor of the land swap. There are enough libraries and ballfields in this area of the county. They are both concerned about the overcrowding of schools. They would rather keep these properties green and open.

Ms. Paula Smith, a Sun City resident, said that this property was purchased to protect the headwaters of the Okatie River. If the county builds structures on these properties, how will the stormwater be addressed? The issue here was public trust. With this land swap it appears to the voters that this property was not actually preserved, and this may tarnish the reputation of the R&C Program. Ms. Smith was not in favor of the land swap. She also suggested that the R&C Board recommend establishing a conservation easement on the Camp St. Mary’s property along with other fee simple properties already purchased.

Mr. Raymond Dominick, a Sun City resident, was not in favor of the land swap. He stated that this area needs to reign in the development. He agreed with Ms. Smith that Camp St. Mary’s needs to be protected with a conservation easement. He said that deforestation hurts the wildlife and logging does not help the environment.

Ms. Suzanne Larson stated that she was here doing research on the land swap project for an article for the Lowcountry Inside Tract.

Mr. Joe Mac with Beaufort Trailblazers stated that his group recently broke ground on property two miles from downtown Beaufort for a bike trail. The Beaufort Trailblazers were still advocating for building bike trails on parks within Beaufort County.

Ms. Robin Buchanan was not in favor of the land swap.

Ms. Jessie White with Coastal Conservation League stated that the CCL was in favor of libraries and active ballfields, but any transfer of R&C property needed to be properly studied to determine if the integrity of the R&C Program was still being upheld. Beaufort County staff and the R&C Board also needed to determine if the properties to be traded met the requirements of the R&C Program. There also needed to be an assessment of stormwater impact if this property was to be developed.

Mr. Don Timms was not for the land swap.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Blocker Field Extension Fee

Ms. Kate Schaefer presented this property located at 549 Sea Island Parkway. The R&C Board saw this project in early 2022 and voted to pursue due diligence. This property would be a fee simple purchase for \$80,000 right next to property already protected within the R&C Program. The ranking score for this property is 6.42.

It was moved by Mr. Webb and seconded by Vice-Chairman Baer to recommend to the Community Service and Land Use Committee the purchase of Project Blocker Field Extension Fee. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Cherry Hill Oak Fee

Ms. Kate Schaefer presented this property located at 2978 Oak View Drive. This was a Quarter 1 application for 12 acres in the Town of Port Royal. This property ranked high on the greenprint for a passive park, was located along the marsh, and contained a 2013 Trees SC Heritage Oak. Ms. Stefanie Nagid, Passive Park Manager, was in favor of this project and was looking for partners to help maintain the property if purchased. Staff was looking for an approval of due diligence for purchase of fee simple.

It was moved by Mr. Bartholow and seconded by Mr. Maffei to recommend to the Community Service and Land Use Committee for due diligence of Project Cherry Hill Oak Fee. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Station Creek PDR

Ms. Kate Schaefer presented this property located at 361 Seaside Road. This was a Quarter 1 application for 124 acres on St. Helena Island. This property ranked high on the greenprint for

preservation of farm soils, was located along the marsh, and was near other protected properties. Ms. Schaefer stated there might be possible partners with the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and the South Carolina Conservation Bank. Staff was looking for an approval of due diligence for purchase of development rights.

It was moved by Mr. Webb and seconded by Mr. Bartholow to recommend to the Community Service and Land Use Committee for due diligence of Project Station Creek PDR. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

New Leaf/Evergreen Land Swap Project

Mr. Chuck Atkinson stated that this land swap was intended for the highest and best use of this property. The New Leaf/Evergreen properties were purchased for a specific use; to protect the watershed behind Sun City and to protect the headwaters of the Okatie river. Originally, the County only wanted the middle piece that included the wetlands. However, the owner would only entertain buying the whole property. Once the Evergreen tract was purchased, the stormwater department constructed a stormwater pond on a portion of the property. Part of the land swap plan would be to take the additional four acres and build a library. The New Leaf piece was originally approached by the Beaufort County School District for their use. But county staff thought that ballfields, built through the PALS Department, would offer more use for all county citizens.

Ms. Schaefer thanked everyone who attended the site visit for these properties on January 5, 2023. She stated that the Rural and Critical ordinance allowed land swaps to happen if there was a super majority vote by County Council.

Property Rankings:

Camp St. Mary’s – 5.57

New Leaf – 8.4

Bluffton Parkway – 3.625

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Webb seconded by Ms. O’Farrell to deny the New Leaf/Evergreen Land Swap Project. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. ABSTAIN – Mr. Maffei. The motion passed.

Okatie Regional Preserve Video

Ms. Amanda Flake presented a video of the R&C Board’s field trip to Okatie Regional Preserve.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: It was moved by Vice-Chairman Baer, seconded by Mr. Webb to adjourn the meeting at 4:45 pm. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bartholow, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Mr. Murray, Ms. O’Farrell, 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: _____