

**MINUTES
RURAL AND CRITICAL LAND PRESERVATION BOARD**

June 08, 2023

ATTENDENCE:

Present: Walter Mack, Vice-Chair Art Bear, Beekman Webb, Ford Bartholow, Stodd Mcewan, Lucia O’Farrell, John Maffei

Absent: Mr Bartholow

County Council: Councilwoman Alice Howard (4), Councilman York Glover (3)

Staff: Chuck Atkinson, Stefanie Nagid, Rob Merchant, Kristen Forbus

Visitors: Kate Schaefer, OLT; Tony Kukulich, Post and Courier; Kristin Williams, OLT; Grace Trask, OLT; Sebastian Lee, Island Packet; Caylor Romines, OLT.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Walter Mack called the meeting to order at 2:30pm and welcomed guests.

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Walter asked to move item #11 to #8. Motion: It was moved by Mr. Maffei, seconded by Mr. Bennett to approve the agenda. The vote: YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Motion to approve agenda with changes: It was moved by Mr. Maffei, seconded by Mr. Bennett: all in favor

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

May 11 2023

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

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Citizen Comments – 3 minutes

Hope Cunningham, resident of Port Royal and member of concerned citizens, spoke in favor of the Cherry Hill Oak project. She described the newly formed Friends of the Cherry Hill Oak and set up a community foundation at the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry and are committed to helping the County take care of the trees if the property is protected.

Michael Murphy, arborist, added to voices of support for the Cherry Hill Oak Parcel, adding that this property contains a heritage tree, the largest tree in Beaufort County and protecting this would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Kevin Phillips, member of Port Royal Town Council, previewed the Town Council meeting which contains a public proclamation about the support for the tree, including support for ongoing maintenance.

Grant McClure, project manager with the Coastal Conservation League, spoke in support of protecting the Cherry Hill Oak. Grant also spoke about Camp St Mary's, adding that it was a great candidate for the program but already owned in fee by County so interested to hear more.

Interim Budget Update

Stefanie provided an interim budget update that accounted for interest gained, miscellaneous revenue, acquisitions (FY 2023 includes Lobeco Farms, Village Creek and Blocker Field + closing) and remaining funds as of June 2 totals \$14.2M remaining. Stefanie provided a list of projects in the queue and coming up (applied for or approved in some way shape or form) totals \$14.4M; however, until council approval this is a fluid accounting and is presenting to provide an understanding of where we are. The Board asked about how the account receives interest and if there was any opportunity to improve the rate of return. Staff and board discussed this is not a final set of numbers and we are still receiving applications and may be in the position to both receive applications and/or make recommendations for the new Greenspace funding program if we no longer have sufficient funds. Staff reiterated our ability to protect the best land at the best price for the taxpayers. This summary does not include passive park funding.

Monthly Project Update

June 30th is the next deadline. CSLU committee will review Boundary Street, Barrell Landing and the remainder of the properties are in due diligence. Staff said that Davis Road landowners are completing their own appraisal. Kate summarized and showed pictures from the helpful Cotton Hall site visit; Mr. Baer was able to attend from the RCLP Board. Blocker Field project closed, an additional acre that provides for the scenic entrance to St Helena Island.

Project Camp St. Mary's Fee

Rob Merchant presented the purchase of Camp St Mary's. County purchased the property from the Catholic Diocese pre-referendum but has struggled on what to do with the property so this is a recommendation from the county administration to bring the property into the RCLP with a purchase. The property was purchased for \$500,000 and a new appraisal has updated its value to \$2,000,000. This property has been sitting there a long time and we've lacked the resources to adequately address reuse of the property so this is a proposal to get the property into the program and proceeds of the sale could go toward design and improvements to make it into a passive park. Board members asked about tearing down buildings; Chuck Atkinson offered the buildings have become a liability and have suffered some vandalism.

Board members asked about scoring for the property: During the land swap discussion (January 2023), staff pulled greenprint maps and assigned a "score". We did not have an appraisal at that time such that 30% of the score would be missing. The bulk of the value in the score comes from the warm colors in the greenprint. Staff (Amanda, Kate) scored the property an average of 5.2 in January; because the property is already owned by the county, the threat to development was understandably low then and now.

Board members asked about resident feedback: previous pushback came from proposal for an active park and county staff does not expect the same for a passive park.

Mr. Bennett asked if the County attorney looked at this with respect to transferring money back to the county and asked if the proposal includes a requirement to use the proceeds on this property specifically, in writing. Mr. Atkinson said yes adding there is not an issue with the purchase and that it is staff's intention to put the proceeds/investment request in writing in the resolution.

Board members expressed concern about their mission to preserve land vs develop parks.

Motion: It was moved by Mr Maffei and seconded by Ms. O'Farrell to make a recommendation not to move forward with the purchase. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O'Farrell, and Mr. Webb. Opposed: Mr. Bennett. The motion to recommend denying the purchase passed.

Annual Vote for Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Mr. Webb nominated Mr Mack but he declined, adding that he believes in term limits. Mr Mack nominated Art Baer for Chair. Mr. McEwan seconded. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O'Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Mr Webb nominated Mr Bennett for vice-chair, Mr Maffei offered a second. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O'Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Project Cotton Hall Fee

Staff re-introduced this property for discussion – an unprotected property between protected land and is the land link between the Port Royal Sound and ACE Basin watershed. The whole property that is available for fee purchase is 527 acres and partners include OSI and SC Conservation Bank. The total ask from RCLP is \$4.5 which will cover county fee simple purchase of Deveaux Hill (232 acres) and Parcel C (294 acres). OSI owns Deveaux Hill and has a one-year option on Parcel C. The question before the board is whether to recommend the county purchase of Deveaux Hill and/or Parcel C. This proposed fee simple purchase is surrounded by three easements (Tomotley, Bindon and Cotton Hall homesite). This area would represent the first passive park in Northern Beaufort County and is a growth management strategy along Highway 17.

Board members asked about OSI's role: they play the role of the interim landowner, having secured the SC Conservation Bank grant and holding title to the property for now. While OSI owns the property, their staff will be managing and then once Beaufort County can purchase it, the passive park program would own the property. Stefanie offered that the first opportunity is to open up the property for non-boat owner fishing access and OSI could offer technical assistance. Board members asked about signage for the property like the sign at Widgeon Point.

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Bennett, seconded by Vice-Chairman Baer to recommend approval to purchase 527 acres for \$4,449,900 to county council. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O'Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Staff clarified that due diligence and purchase price have now been authorized. This will go to CSLU committee on Monday June 12, 2023.

Project Cherry Hill Oak Fee

Staff introduced this property and highlighted the partnership between the landowner, friends group, Town and County. Landowners are also contributing to the park itself via contribution to the County and escrowed for park management. Town of Port Royal would amend town maintenance contract and maintain the property similar to their maintenance of Fort Frederick.

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Webb to recommend approval to purchase Cherry Hill Oak to county council, seconded by Mr Maffei. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Project Tarver Tract PDR

Staff offered that the purchase price for the Tarver PDR was relatively high and recommended negotiating with the landowner or partnership with other funding sources to reduce burden to RCLP program. No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Mack, and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 4:15 pm. YAYS – Chairman Mack, Vice-Chairman Baer, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maffei, Mr. McEwan, Ms. O’Farrell, and Mr. Webb. The motion passed.

Submitted by: Approved:

Amanda Flake, Beaufort County Community Development Natural Resources Planner

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

Date: _____