



2020 Hampton Street ▪ Room 3063A
 P.O. Box 192 ▪ Columbia, SC 29202
 (803) 576-2080

**Minutes
 July 19, 2021**

Attendance

Commissioner	District	Present
Charles Weber	1	Yes
Tim McSwain	2	Yes
Sam Holland	3	No
Glenice Pearson	4	Yes
Buddy Atkins	5	Yes
John Grego	6	Yes
Robert Squirewell	7	Yes
Vacant	8	--
Vacant	9	--
Darrell Jackson, Jr	10	Yes
Gail Rodriguez	11	Yes

Staff & Visitors	Affiliation
Annette House	Building Inspections Division
Brian Crooks	Planning Services Division
Jim Rhodes	RSWCD Commissioner
Geonard Price	Planning Services Division

Call to Order

Grego welcomed everyone, welcomed Atkins back, and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 3:34 pm. All members, staff, and guests participated by Zoom video conference due to the closure of County offices as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approval of Agenda

⇒ **McSwain moved to approve the agenda and was seconded by Rodriguez. The motion passed unanimously.**

⇒ **Grego moved to accept the minutes pending grammatical edits and was seconded by Weber. The motion passed.**

Atkins stated he was not going to vote on the June meeting minutes; he would like to minimize the word “that” being used multiple times in the minutes.

Report of the Chair

- **In-person meetings - action item**

⇒ **Weber moved to have the next meeting in person which was seconded by Pearson.**

There was much discussion about all meetings not needing to be in person, if there was an alternative location other than the county building, and if there could be a Zoom meeting with others meeting in person.

⇒ **The motion passed unanimously.**

- **Land Development Code (LDC) letter - action item**

Grego stated he has shared the LDC letter a couple of times and it had been put on hold so that citizen and development stakeholder input could be reflected in the letter. He also stated their feedback has been relatively mild; related to keeping zoning density lower than the staff has proposed.

Grego suggested a motion for this letter to be sent to Crooks under commission letterhead.

⇒ **Weber moved to forward letter under commission letterhead to Crooks and was seconded by Buddy Atkins.**

Grego stated there are a lot of upcoming developments for which people would like to freeze development; the Lower Richland community proposed once an area has been zoned and not developed in a sufficient amount of time, then developers have to re-apply for the rezoning. Atkins stated he has not had the opportunity to read through the letter and wanted to know if the letter consistent with the last draft written about a month or ago. Grego replied it is consistent.

⇒**The motion passed unanimously.**

- **Interim Chair for Conservation Committee - action item**

⇒ **Atkins motioned to appoint Weber as Interim Chair until Atkins is ready to resume his duties and was seconded by McSwain. The motion passed unanimously.**

- **Lower Richland Tourism Plan – update**

Grego stated the Commission had been approached by County staff with a possible strategy for moving forward with the Lower Richland Tourism Plan. It would involve re-endorsing the plan, submitting it to the Council through the Planning Commission as an amendment to the County's Comprehensive Plan. The tourism plan would become the County's plan attached to the Lower Richland Master Plan and the overall Comprehensive plan and could open up some resources. Councilwoman Chakisse Newton is interested in having a workshop on the Lower Richland Tourism Plan before we proceed with the next steps. The Lower Richland Tourism Plan was originally approved and sent to Council in February 20, 2019. There was much discussion regarding the plan--how Council needs to be educated on it since many of the members were not here when it was approved, the importance of how the plan is implemented and having Council support for it, particularly for those areas in Lower Richland.

- **Lower Richland County Community Meeting - update**

Rodriguez stated the LR Community group got started with the uproar over the Rabbit Run development and other proposed developments in Lower Richland when people realized how much was getting developed and how long ago the rezoning had taken place prior to the current development plan. Many members have embraced the Lower Richland Tourism Plan, asking why there had not been progress. Rodriguez indicated she had informed them this was not an approved plan; it was approved by the Conservation Commission but not by the County Council. Unfortunately a previous Council member was there who said it was approved by Council. This is really a problem with Lower Richland; the misinformation they are getting even from people who had former authority. Rodriguez stated she is finding those things really hard to deal with because Norman

Jackson was a Councilman and she is just on the Conservation Commission. One of the Lower Richland residents checked with Epps, who confirmed that the plan was not approved by Council and posted his reply on their Facebook page. Their hope is the Lower Richland Tourism Plan would help to keep Lower Richland more rural. Two other items of interest are Pinewood Lake Park and Good Hope Church; the church is for sale for \$85,000.00, all of the windows have been fixed and paid for with a RCCC grant.

Weber asked was the church on sale by the congregation. Grego stated no, though the congregation still owns it; he hasn't checked the recent tax records to see who owns it. (Note: Grego later shared the deed—the congregation sold the church to Columbia Metro Baptist Association Inc.

- **State passage of S152 – update**

Grego stated the Green Space Sales Tax was passed on May 13, 2021 by the SC Senate, it gives counties the opportunity to amend their local sales tax. The SC House will consider the bill in 2022.

Treasurer's Report

- **FY22 General budget status- update**

Squirewell reported in Epps absence--there is \$279,000.00 in Professional Services and \$145, 225.00 in Acquisition, which increased from last year. Weber wanted to know if this is the first reporting month under the new budget or the last reporting month of the old budget. McSwain responded it is the first reporting month of the new budget. The budget shown is for July 1, 2021.

Reported by Grego-Epps stated the transfer in of the \$143,988.00 had not been completed at the time of the budget inquiry; Epps has asked when it will occur. Since the transfer in has not occurred, the division of these funds for Pinewood Lake Park, Millcreek and Cabin Branch portions has also not occurred.

Conservation Committee Report

- **Ganus easement- update**

Weber reported Epps is in touch with the attorneys; they're in discussion issues regarding amending this easement.

- **Cabin Branch-update**

Epps has selected an appraiser and the Purchase Order to engage them is in the works.

Historic Committee Report

- Grego reported on behalf of Holland - a historical marker for South Carolina State Library is underway.

Conservation Manager's Report

- **RCCC grants- update**

Grego reported on behalf of Epps - all FY 2022 recommended grants were approved by County Council and Epps is working on getting them added into the system correctly. Contact letters with grant agreements were sent out; there will be a Fiscal Briefing meeting for grantees at 10:00 am at 2020 Hampton Street, 4th floor conference room on July 27, 2021.

- **Annual Plan for County Council**

Grego reported Epps had hoped to have a draft Annual Plan done by this meeting but did not have time to do so. Weber indicated Soil & Water had an excellent meeting on a strategic plan for communication and outreach. Weber stated a review was done for the last 6 months looking at the strengths and weaknesses and flaws of the process in trying to communicate on the budget issue. Some things were done well, some were not done too well and some things could have been done better.

McSwain stated the District met in small groups--each group had to come up with what the District did well, what the District did not do well and what could have been done differently. Relationships with Council members was a main point which needed improvement.

Rhodes stated we have an obligation to educate Council on what we do; most of them do not realize what we do.

Pearson stated all of the Commissioners need to know what the Conservation District does and she has learned more about the Richland Soil & Water Conservation District during the battle with the budget than she has ever known before.

Weber indicated he re-listened to the Council budget meeting and in his opinion the Soil & Water District came out really good. County Administrator Leonardo Brown even stated he has now learned what the Soil & Water District is all about in some of his statements and the Commission has some work to do educating Council members on the RCCC.

Rhodes stated Council Member Derrek Pugh informed him the Council reservations were around the RCCC going to Council with everything; it was a concern for them as to what the Commission was to bring to Council and what was not to go to Council.

Weber stated we have to go through Council with everything.

Pearson stated she thinks the Commission does not have the kind of communication and connection with all of the communities of the County that they should have.

Jackson stated Council Member English is very interested in helping in any way she can. Since so many of the councilmembers are new, the Commission can bring them in and fill them in on exactly what the Commission does. With so many of County Council members being new; we have the opportunity to shape our message and get in front of them early.

Rhodes indicated he totally agrees and plans to meet one on one with other Councilmembers more frequently.

McSwain stated money talks, if we manage land correctly and produce revenue from commission properties, this could be a huge benefit in the eyes of the Council, as well as an appropriate land management activity.

- **Potential Mitigation credit purchase- update**

Grego reported on behalf of Epps - Epps had a meeting with John Thompson and interim Transportation Director Michael Maloney to discuss options for the potential mitigation credit purchase.

- Hiring of vacant positions- (Land Program Planner, Conservation Program Analyst and Administrative Assistant)

The Land Program Planner and Conservation Program Analyst positions have been posted and Epps is reviewing applications. He has made selections and the top 2 or 3 will be interviewed with Conservation Commission help.

Grego addressed Pearson's concern stating the qualifications should be discussed with Epps while reviewing applications for the positions.

Pearson stated she believes a lot of the progress we were able to make particularly in the preservation of African American sites was largely because of Nancy Stone-Collum's exceptional commitment to understanding and learning more about history and being able to work with people in the African American community, to understanding how they could present their history, and to providing assistance on preparation of grant applications. Pearson also stated Stone-Collum left a huge hole in staff capability once she retired. Pearson said with a great deal of anxiety that expertise in historical preservation was a critical part of what we need as a part of the staff for the commission. There was much discussion regarding the need for capable staff for the RCCC.

Grego indicated Epps has asked whether the Administrative Assistant position will be supervised by Conservation instead of CP&D.

Pearson stated we made a major argument for the Richland County African American community when we were fighting for funds and for us not to have any representation on the staff who have at least part of their experience related in some fashion to history and preservation, particularly with regards to the African American community, would be a huge oversight.

Pearson also stated she doesn't even think you can talk about conservation and historic preservation in Richland County if you are not talking a great deal about African American history.

Grego stated the Commission has two positions now and it would be interesting to learn from Epps what the applicant pool looks like; Grego hopes it's diverse.

Pearson went on to say we are at a point where we are going to have to stop hoping for things and make sure certain things happen.

New Business

For the District 8 position on the Commission, which was Carol's old position, John Grego stated Overture Walker appointed Depaoli as Carol's successor. She had a conflict in her schedule and could not attend. The District 9 seat is open.

Rodriguez stated she is learning a lot about how development works and if anyone could help her to learn the Zoning process from beginning to end, she would be appreciative. She found out transportation doesn't evaluate structures until after everything is built and it seems backward. She stated a lot of stuff doesn't make sense to her in the development process.

McSwain stated he could talk to her after the meeting about what occurred in Blythewood during the last 30 years. All of the concerns Eastover is having have occurred in the Blythewood area.

Weber stated he can give her some input as well.

Adjournment

⇒ McSwain moved to adjourn which was seconded by Pearson. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Annette House.